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ABSTRACT

A project used a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach, drawing from the Job Corps database and site visits at five sites, to generate knowledge that can guide policymakers and program planners as they act to increase retention in the Job Corps or similar programs. Quantitative data on 343,097 students who enrolled in Job Corps between July 1993 and December 1998 were analyzed. Of this group, 86 percent remained in the program at 30 days, and 64 percent remained at 90 days. Students were more likely to leave if they were in centers in which they were greatly in the minority by race, and younger students were much more likely to leave under negative circumstances than older students. Qualitative data showed that intrinsic unmeasured characteristics of students, such as commitment, attitude, motivation, confidence, maturity level, emotional status, willingness to change, and ability to interact with others, are of great importance in determining whether students will stay. Barriers to retention include intrinsic student factors, personal or institutional barriers, and student-staff interactions. The study concluded that although the easiest way to improve retention statistics would be to discourage youth at greatest risk of dropping out from enrolling in the program, this approach would be inconsistent with Job Corps' mission of serving the nation's most needy youth. Among recommendations for staff were that they demonstrate they expect the best from all youth; build students' self-confidence and sense of

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connectedness to peers and staff; learn to communicate effectively with youth from different cultures; teach stress reduction and coping strategies; foster a multicultural environment; and communicate effectively with youth at different developmental stages.. (Contains 110 references.) (KC)

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RETENTION IN THE UNITED STATES JOB CORPS:

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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Executive Summary

The United States Job Corps is designed to move youth from poverty to meaningful work. It offers youth the key prerequisites to meaningful employment – job training and education. It also recognizes that a truly employable person is equipped to change his or her life direction. Thus, its program offers multiple supports including counseling, social and soft skills training, shelter, food, and comprehensive health care.

Like all programs serving disenfranchised youth, Job Corps has been challenged by program attrition. The objective of this project is to generate a body of knowledge that can guide policy makers and program planners as they take steps to increase retention. The report's overriding premise is that dropout is not a random event; rather it is a process that can be influenced.

In order to create a knowledge base with the depth to help determine the factors that affect program retention, the research team used a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach. This process took advantage of the Job Corps database and uses qualitative research to explore unmeasured student and program characteristics. Five centers were visited where group techniques, interviews, and observation were used to collect student and staff viewpoints on retention. Center Directors and Orientation Managers responded to a series of surveys in which they generated, prioritized, and explained their views. As an added layer of this analysis, a literature review on attrition was conducted and models that could contribute to fostering the type of environment conducive to retention were explored.

Attrition

It is clear that disenfranchised youth – whether through socioeconomic or more personal circumstances – are at greatest risk for dropout. Within this cohort, those youth with negative life experiences, a lack of positive influential role models, low self-esteem, and an external locus of control (feeling that one's life is out of one's hands) are more attrition prone. The ability to buffer stress also plays an extremely important role in one's ability to maintain committment to a program.

National data reveal that school dropouts differ little by gender but vary greatly by race and socioeconomic status. While groups "at-risk" for dropout are clearly defined, the danger of

overgeneralization in labeling a group as "at-risk" prior to controlling for other variables is documented. Further, the majority of dropouts are youth not in designated risk groups.

Reports on intervention programs all acknowledge that a program attempting to achieve full retention would need to be so selective and rigid in its admissions process that it would likely screen out some of the youth who most need it. No report has yet been able to come up with a highly predictive model based on easily measured characteristics. This suggests that unmeasured factors such as attitude, motivation, personal program experience, or events that occur outside of the program, are the key, but incalculable, factors that affect length of stay.

Three Department of Education sponsored initiatives to address attrition were reviewed. Evaluations of these efforts generated several recommendations relevant to Job Corps that will be presented here in aggregate.

- Staff providing student services should be carefully selected, well trained, and adequately supported.
- Services need to be delivered within a supportive climate that includes adults as student advocates, counselors and mentors.
- Programs should put additional services into the program to serve youth at risk for dropout rather than pull students out of the classroom.
- Services should be delivered without calling attention to the fact that special services are being provided.
- Students should be provided with substantive incentives to participate.
- Environments should be structured and include clear and equitably enforced behavioral expectations.
- A multicultural approach that recognizes the strengths of cultures and targets interventions toward cultures meets with more success.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data on 343,097 students who enrolled in Job Corps between 7/1/93 and 12/31/98 was analyzed. Sixty percent of the students were male, 50% were African-American, 28% were Caucasian, 16% were Hispanic, 4% were Native American, and 2% were Asian or Pacific Islander. Forty percent of students were younger than 18 years old at enrollment. Sixty-

one percent completed the tenth grade or lower and 38% were receiving some form of government assistance.

In the total population, 86% of students remained in the program at 30 days, and 64% remained at 90 days. To obtain a gross measure of resources allocated on students who left prior to 90 days compared to those who completed the program, the number of days spent on center were analyzed for all students who enrolled in 1996. Though 35% of students in this cohort left prior to 90 days, they used only 7% of the total days Job Corps invested in all 1996 enrollees throughout their stay. Students who completed the program used 59% of the total days.

Women on centers with less than 40% female representation drop out at higher rates than expected. In centers with greater than 40% female representation, women are more likely to be retained. Conversely, males have higher than expected attrition rates on centers with 60% or greater males, and have lower attrition rates on centers that are balanced by gender or have more women.

White students at centers with less than 40% white representation had higher than expected dropout rates, and conversely were more likely to stay at centers with greater than 40% representation. Hispanic students had higher than expected attrition rates when they were on centers with less than 30% Hispanic representation, close to expected rates in centers with 30-80% representation, and dramatically lower rates in centers with near total Hispanic representation. No clear patterns could be demonstrated for students of African-American, Asian, or Native American heritage.

Data revealed differences between groups in whether they left under negative (AWOL or disciplinary) or more ordered circumstances (resignation or completion). Males were more likely than females to have left under negative circumstances (52% vs. 43%). Fifty-five percent of 16 and 17 year-olds left under negative circumstances compared to 45% of 18-20 year olds and 38% of 21-25 year olds. Fifty-two percent of students with neither a high school diploma nor a GED left under these negative circumstances compared to 34% of students with one of these educational achievements.

The association between descriptive variables and three outcomes of interest (30-day retention, 90-day retention, and GED and/or vocational completion) was explored using logistic regression modeling. The logistic regression allows the association between each variable and outcome to be revealed, while controlling for all other variables. There were several associations

between variables and positive outcome that remained consistent among the different outcomes of interest. Females consistently had better outcomes than males; they were 21% more likely to remain on center at 90 days, and 10% more likely to complete their GED and/ or vocation. Younger students had poorer outcomes than older students. The difference of an added year in age predicted a student was 8% more likely to be retained at 90 days and 12% more likely to complete the program. When compared to Caucasians, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics consistently had better outcomes, African-Americans had similar outcomes, and Native Americans had more disappointing outcomes. Students who needed bilingual education were substantially more likely to be retained and to complete the program. Higher prior educational attainment also consistently predicted more favorable outcomes. For each higher grade-level a student scored on his/her entrance tests, there was a 3-4% higher probability of retention beyond 90 days and an 8-9% increased likelihood of completing the program. Students who saw admissions counselors on sites were 25% more likely to still be on center at 30 days and 15% more likely to be retained beyond 90 days. Students who enrolled in urban sites were 16% more likely to stay in the program than students enrolled in rural sites. Finally, even when controlled for other variables, administrative region was important to all outcomes.

The logistic regressions did not substantially increase our ability to predict outcomes. For example, the 90-day retention model correctly predicted the desired outcome 70% of the time. Without modeling, if we had assumed all students stay in the program at 90 days, we would have been correct 64% of the time. This modest increase of 6% in our ability to predict retention reveals that unmeasured variables account for most of the factors that influence retention.

Qualitative Insight

The qualitative results are useful in describing the unmeasured factors that influence whether someone stays in the program. The experts of Job Corps seemed to come to consensus on the following points.

- Intrinsic unmeasured characteristics of students are of great importance in determining whether students will stay. These characteristics include student commitment, attitude, motivation, confidence, maturity level, emotional status, willingness to change, and ability to interact with others.

- Whether a student has made his/her own decision to come to Job Corps makes a difference to the level of motivation and commitment a student needs to fully engage in the program.
- The staff-student relationship is critical to making a difference in whether students commit to the program. Participants repeatedly cited how staff members' capacity to demonstrate support, caring, respect and a commitment to student success was the pivotal ingredient in transforming young people.
- Many students have emotional difficulties and/or substance use problems that may stem from a history of living in challenging circumstances. Students with these problems are more attrition-prone, and require specialized support.
- The ability of students to adhere to center rules, and the ability of staff to convey them in a consistent manner that emphasizes employability, rather than restriction, makes a difference in a student's ability to acclimate to center life.
- Whether the student's vocation of choice is available on center in a timely manner makes a difference to that student's decision to stay.
- Job Corps is a multicultural environment. Students' ability to adapt to and thrive in such an environment is important to their acclimation to center life.

Increasing Retention

The theoretical and practical perspectives of the resiliency and youth development models, developmental psychology, and a stress-coping paradigm are explored in consideration of how to create a center environment conducive to student retention. Resiliency increases students' capacity to overcome those personal and systemic barriers that might otherwise prevent them from meeting Job Corps' challenge as well as lifelong challenges. The youth development model strives to move youth beyond the "we will fix-it for you" paradigm, and instead challenges them to strive to become valued integral members of a community. The stress-coping paradigm presents how to guide students toward positive coping strategies and away from familiar coping strategies that may lead to disciplinary separation. Developmental psychology offers the basics of how to most effectively reach youth of different ages.

A program committed to building longstanding resiliency should foster four traits known as "the four C's" – competence, character, confidence, and connectedness. Confidence and connectedness must be generated quickly if a program hopes to retain youth. Students who lack confidence will choose to leave the program to save face, rather than taking the risk of experiencing a failure. Reinforcing areas of competence gives an individual the needed confidence to confront future challenges. Students are lonely and homesick when they arrive on center. If they do not quickly gain a sense of belonging on center, they will choose to leave. Possibilities to enhance connectedness include peer and adult mentorship, discussion groups, cultural-pride events and athletics.

Youth want to be challenged. They want to feel that the investment in Job Corps will lead them to feel successful, to be valued, and to contribute to their community. Unchallenged, they may feel that the program will not benefit them and may choose to leave. Young people whose strengths are recognized, fostered, and developed will better survive, more efficiently change, and more creatively overcome limitations to perform better in the work environment. Staff who understand and promote healthy youth development can move students toward positive behaviors and avoid the rebellious confrontations present between mid-adolescents and authority figures.

Youth from stressful environments have often used maladaptive coping strategies to overcome stress. These harmful, albeit temporarily effective, strategies for dealing with stress can lead to program dropout or disciplinary termination. Staff can teach and model for students alternative positive coping strategies. For example, prohibiting drug use alone may backfire because the student may not have alternate coping strategies. Rather than only telling youth what not to do, they must be told what to do.

Conclusions

Some would argue that the easiest way to improve retention statistics would be to profile youth at greatest risk of dropout and recommend they not enroll in the program. Excluding youth at greatest risk of dropout would be inconsistent with Job Corps' mission of serving the nation's most needy youth. Further, the quantitative analysis informs us that no easily measurable student characteristics are reliable enough predictors of program dropout to justify excluding any individual. The more challenging approach is to maintain the commitment to

work with youth in greatest need, and to determine steps the program needs to take to maximize their likelihood of staying

The qualitative exploration reveals some of the unmeasured factors that determine whether or not students engage themselves fully in the program. These factors can be divided into three broad categories: 1) intrinsic student factors; 2) personal or institutional barriers that prevent students from attaining the comfort level necessary for them to fully engage in the program; and 3) student-staff interactions. The pivotal role of the staff-student relationship is the common thread between the three categories. Only staff can give students the support they need to develop those intrinsic traits (e.g., motivation, positive attitude, and confidence) that determine whether they will succeed in the program. Further, staff are positioned to minimize institutional barriers (e.g., assuring center safety, eliminating sexual harassment, helping students acclimate to a multicultural environment or shared living spaces) and to help youth overcome personal barriers (e.g., dependence on illegal substances as coping strategies, lack of confidence, loneliness).

Recommendations

The overriding recommendation of this research responds to the pivotal role staff members play in determining the success of students. Job Corps should initiate a staff-development effort to assure all staff members are equipped with the training necessary to maximize their impact on students. The initiative should have clearly defined objectives. They should include staff members' acquiring skill-sets that will assure they are well prepared to:

- recognize and take active steps to lower institutional and personal barriers to students' ongoing participation in the program;
- demonstrate that they expect the best from youth, and hold them accountable to achieving their best;
- build students' confidence in their ability to achieve;
- build students' sense of connectedness to their peers, to staff, and to the integrity of the program;
- generate challenges for young people that enable them to explore their capabilities;
- communicate effectively with youth from different cultural backgrounds;

- foster a thriving multicultural environment;
- model and teach stress reduction and positive coping strategies; and
- communicate effectively with youth at different developmental stages.

If the initiative is well implemented, the potential rewards to student and staff may significantly outweigh the expenditure of resources. If staff-student relationships are made more effective, not only will retention increase, but also every aspect of the program that involves staff guiding, educating, or training students will benefit. Further, like all adults who work with youth with a history of past failures, Job Corps staff members are inspired by young people's successes, but often experience frustration for those who do not make it. A staff development effort that genuinely improves staff members' capacity to tip the scales toward success will lessen staff frustration, increase their job-satisfaction and possibly even affect staff turnover.

Additional recommendations include:

- **Job Corps should strive toward balancing genders at each site.**
  The data revealed that women are more likely to remain in the program when the center has at least 40% female students. Men, on the other hand, have an increased rate of leaving the program when the centers have a large male population.
- **Job Corps should study how to best retain students with dependents.**
  Though this analysis has not produced data enabling us to definitively recommend how to best support students with dependents, certain solutions seem worth considering. An expansion of non-residential centers or non-residential slots may allow parents greater latitude to attend Job Corps. Increased childcare capacity on sites may both attract more women and allow adults with dependents to attend the program more easily.
- **Recognizing that students with lower educational test scores are more attrition prone, Job Corps should study what extra supports these students may need**.
  The challenge is in determining what support may make a difference in a student being able to change a pattern of low achievement. It might be some combination of academic enrichment with measures that build confidence. Further study in this area is warranted.

- **Job Corps should explore how best to serve its youngest participants.** Forty percent of Job Corps students are 16 or 17 years of age. Qualitative and quantitative analyses confirm that younger age is associated with program attrition. Further study is warranted, but a body of literature and experience exists on how to best engage mid-adolescents, promote their positive behaviors and limit their conflicts with authority figures.
- **Prospective students should receive a pre-enrollment center preview.** Even when controlled for other variables, students screened for admission on a Job Corps Center were 25% more likely to be retained at 30 days. It seems students with a better idea of what to expect were more likely to stay. It is not feasible to move all admission offices to centers as it would discriminate against youth that live at a distance. It may be cost effective to offer pre-enrollment tours. At the least, a detailed video program describing life on each center should be available for students unable to receive a tour.

Introduction

The United States Job Corps is the nation's largest program designed to move youth from poverty to meaningful work. It offers youth the key prerequisites to meaningful employment – job training and education. However, it also recognizes that a truly employable person is one who is equipped to change his or her life direction. Thus, its program offers multiple supports including counseling, social and soft skills training, shelter, food, and comprehensive health care.

No program, no matter how multilayered or well designed, can have maximal effect if its participants leave before reaching their objectives. Like all programs serving disenfranchised youth, Job Corps has been challenged by program attrition. The overriding objective of this project is to generate a body of knowledge that can guide policy makers and program planners toward steps that would likely increase retention within Job Corps.

The importance of increasing retention within Job Corps can be viewed from three perspectives: 1) as the nation's most aggressive effort to move youth from poverty to work, there is a moral imperative to produce a program that has maximal effect on participants; 2) high dropout makes the program less cost-effective; and 3) failure in a program like Job Corps may do harm to the individual. Each of the youth Job Corps serves has a history of hardship and has taken a chance to better their lives. If they succeed, many will return to be role models in their community. If they fail, they will have to muster even more bravery to take a chance again.

Though this report is about the United States Job Corps, every youth program struggles with attrition. Our hope is that other programs may be able to gather insight relevant to their operations from these data and may learn more through the changes Job Corps may implement based upon these findings.

Several questions must be explored if a serious effort is to be made to address retention within the United States Job Corps:

- How many students drop out?
- When do students drop out?
- Which students drop out?
- Why do students drop out?
- What might be done to prevent students from dropping out?

Job Corps gathers data on the nearly 70,000 students per year who participate in the program. Existing intake and exit data can begin to answer several of the above questions. Because the data record how long each individual stays, it can easily describe how many students drop out and when they leave. The data hold the potential of answering the pivotal question "Which students drop out?" The challenge is in carefully and fairly categorizing students. The existing database can certainly point to trends and associations between easily measured characteristics (e.g., gender, age, race, socioeconomic status) and length of stay. However, these easily measured characteristics only begin to describe people; they tell you little of their experience, their expectations, or their potential. Thus, simplistically describing students poses a real danger of overgeneralization.

There would be two ways in which rigorous research could better elucidate which students drop out. The most useful associations between student characteristics and retention could be made if the existing database included more descriptive student data (e.g., student learning style, personality style, motivation, resiliency, and emotional state) and a detailed record of each student's experience within Job Corps. Because this database currently does not exist, quantitative analysis remains limited in explaining retention. Alternatively, qualitative research can gain detailed insight from experts (students and those staff who relate to them). Their insight can produce plausible explanations of the dropout process, and can thereby generate hypotheses about the forces at play when a student chooses to stay or to leave. Qualitative data, however, is limited in its ability to demonstrate the direct associations that would confirm these contributors' hypotheses.

This report utilizes a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach to draw from the strengths of both methodologies. It takes advantage of the extensive data Job Corps collects on its students as well as available information on each student's experience with the program. However, because the database leaves many student and program characteristics unmeasured and does not detail students' perceptions or experiences in the program, qualitative research supplements the analysis. Five centers were visited where group techniques, interviews, and observation were used to collect the student and staff viewpoint on retention. In addition, a series of surveys was used to engage Center Directors and Orientation Managers in a process whereby they generated, prioritized, and explained their views on the issues that affect retention.

As a first layer of this analysis on attrition and retention, the literature is reviewed. First, patterns of attrition within Job Corps and other programs are explored, as are the known causes of dropout. Then, the youth development and resiliency literatures are incorporated into a review that considers how to foster an environment conducive to retention.

CHAPTER 1 – ATTRITION IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Attrition affects all intervention programs whether large or small, brief or long term. The effect of program dropout is multifold. First, even the best-designed program will reach only a fraction of its potential effect if the intended audience leaves before completion. Second, because recruitment and orientation are labor intensive, early dropout poses a financial challenge to programs. Third, youth who drop out may feel as if they failed. This perception of failure, especially in the context of a cycle of failures, may do the individual harm by limiting the likelihood that they will take another chance toward self-improvement.

For the above reasons, intervention programs are generally interested in lowering attrition. However, the best case scenario may not be to eliminate attrition altogether. A program with a primary goal of full retention would need to be so selective and rigid in its admissions process that it would likely screen out some of the youth who most need it. Further, a small amount of attrition allows programs to set clearly defined standards and hold participants to those standards. Participants who are disruptive sometimes need to leave the program so that it is able to offer the best service to the majority of participants. Therefore, a program generally seeks a balance that allows it to run efficiently for the youth that need it most and are likely to reap maximal program benefit.

Researchers in the educational, social work and business disciplines have explored youth retention. It is beyond the scope of this report to offer a full review of these literatures. Generally, the literature explores aspects of 1) the participant or program characteristics associated with attrition; 2) retention within a particular program; or 3) how an individual can best be supported to remain in the program. Because this report looks closely at participant and program characteristics specific to Job Corps, we will expose the reader only to a general overview of others' findings in these areas. In addition, we will include literature on attrition within selected youth programs that may offer insight into attrition within Job Corps. In Chapter 4, we will explore in greatest detail strategies that Job Corps might consider to increase retention, primarily focusing on how to give youth the support they need to succeed.

Which Youth are Prone to Attrition?

Because the educational level of our youth has broad consequences for the nation, school dropout has been looked at extensively. Though this literature is not fully generalizable to intervention programs like Job Corps, most youth in these programs are high school dropouts. Therefore, a first step toward understanding attrition in Job Corps is to understand which youth drop out of school and what conditions led them to drop out.

It is clear that disenfranchised youth – whether through socioeconomic or more personal circumstances – are at greatest risk for school dropout. The Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents estimates that approximately 50% of American children and adolescents are currently at risk for developing personal and social problems (Shaw 1995). These problems include substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, depression, delinquency, HIV infection, school failure, and school dropout. Weissberg states that these problems will jeopardize one's potential to lead productive, successful adult lives (Weissberg 1990).

Joy Dreyfoos synthesized existing literature in Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention (1990). She points out that there is a tremendous overlap in these high-risk behaviors, with few youth being highest risk. She states that half of all young people are at low-risk for engaging in any of these behaviors. Dreyfoos estimates that one-quarter are experimenters who may dabble in negative behaviors and be one year behind in school, but are not entrenched in more than one worrisome behavior. Meanwhile, 15% of adolescents engage in two or three of these problem behaviors, and 10% are engaging in multiple high-risk behaviors. It is critical for programs that work with school dropouts to understand that they are likely to be working with youth with multiple interrelated risk behaviors.

Dreyfoos describes the "chicken and the egg quandary" when trying to determine which variables precede school failure and dropout and which variables are the results of alienation from school. Her book synthesizes the existing literature as of 1990 and nicely summarizes the known antecedents and consequences of school failure and dropout. The following tables and primary references are directly excerpted from her book.

She notes that many variables appear on both lists – explaining both the cyclical intergenerational nature of school failure and the difficulty of differentiating antecedents from

consequences. Regarding the interrelatedness of risky behaviors, she culls the literature and explores which of these behaviors, if any, is the precipitating event. Further, she tries to determine what is the sequencing of these events. She concludes that school failure begins to occur at an early age, and that once failure occurs, other events begin to take place. "Doing poorly in school and minor delinquent offenses seem to fit together, and as these high-risk children grow older, substance abuse and sexual activity enter the picture, and the major negative consequences – early childbearing, heavy substance abuse, serious delinquency, and dropping out ensue" (Dreyfoos 1990, pg. 105). Youth with multiple interrelated problems are likely to have a sense of personal deficit registered at an early age because of school failure. Overcoming this sense of personal failure might have far reaching consequences.

Table 1. Antecedents of School Dropout

Antecedent	Association with Dropping Out
Demographic	
Age	** Old for grade
Sex	*Males
Race and ethnicity	**Native American, Hispanic, Black
Personal	
Expectations for education	**Low expectations, no plans for college
School grades	**Low grades
Basic skills	**Low test scores
School promotion	**Left back in early grades
Attitude toward school	**Strong dislike, bored
Conduct, general behavior	**Truancy, "acting
Peer Influence	*Friends have low expectations for school **Friends drop out
School involvement	**Low interest, low participation
Involvement in other high-risk behaviors	*Early delinquency, substance use, early sexual intercourse
Social Life	*Frequent dating, riding around
Conformity-rebelliousness	*Nonconformity, alienation
Psychological factors	Stress, depression
Pregnancy	**High rates for childbearers
Family	
Household composition	*Inconsistent data
Income, poverty status	**Family in poverty
Parental education	**Low levels of education
Welfare	*Family on welfare
Mobility	*Family moves frequently
Parental role, bonding, guidance	**Lack of parental support, authoritarian, permissive
Culture in home	*Lack of resources in home
Primary language	*Other than English
Community	
Neighborhood quality	*Urban, high-density area, poverty area, also rural
School quality	**Alternative or vocational school **Segregated school *Large schools, large classes *Tracking, emphasis on testing *Public (vs. parochial)
Employment	*Higher rates of employment

*=Cited in selected sources
**=Major predictor
Sources: R. Rumberger, "Dropping Out of High School: The Influence of Race, Sex and Family Background," American Educational Research Journal 20(1983):199-220; S. Barro and A. Kolstad, Who Drops Out of High School? Findings from High School and Beyond (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, May 1987), pp. 25-60; A. Hahn, J. Danzberger, and B. Lefkowitz, Dropouts in America: Enough is Known for Action (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership, March (1987), pp. 11-25; R. Rumberger, R. Ghatak, G. Paulos, P. Ritter, and S. Dornbusch, "Family Influences on Dropout Behavior: An Exploratory Study of a Single High School" (Unpublished paper, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1988), 26-27; R. Eckstrom, M. Goerta, J. Pollack, and K. Rock, "Who Drops Out of High School and Why? Findings from a National Study," Teachers College Record 87 (1986): 356-73.

Table 2. Consequences of School Failure and Dropout

	Consequences	
Behavior	**Short Term**	**Long Term**
Low achievement	Nonpromotion	Dropout
Poor Grades	Difficulty gaining admission to college	Low basic skills
	Truancy, absenteeism	Lack of a college degree
Nonpromotion	Low self-esteem	Dropout
Left back	Low involvement in school activities	
	Problem behaviors	
	Alienation	
Dropout	Unemployment	No entry to labor force
		Welfare dependency
		Low-level jobs
	Low wages	Low lifetime earnings
		Repeated job changes
	Depression	Later regrets
	Alienation	Poor physical health
		Mental health problems
	Low basic skills	Illiteracy
	Delinquency	Criminal career, prison
		Marital instability
		Divorce
	Pregnancy	Early childbearing
	Abortion	
		Social costs: lost tax revenue, welfare expenditures

Sources: D. Kandel, V. Raveis, and P. Kandel, "Continuity in Discontinuities: Adjustment in Young Adulthood of Former School Absentees," Youth and Society 15(1984): 325-52: G. Berlin and A. Sum, Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988). Pp. 24-38: E. Ginzberg, H. Berliner, and M. Ostow, Young People at Risk: Is Prevention Possible? (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988), pp. 105-21.

Youth forced to deal with these complex interrelated problems will not only have less tolerance and less ability to successfully complete school but they also will have a decreased capacity to succeed in jobs and programs they turned to for help. These personal and social problems form part of the core of the *participants*' attributes that lead to attrition.

The psychology literature tries to delineate the underlying factors within an individual's personality and background to describe what leads to attrition and how to decrease it. Many variables have been identified that affect attrition or retention which include life experiences, influential individuals, self-esteem, and locus of control. Those youth with negative life experiences, a lack of positive influential role models, low self-esteem, and an external locus of

control (feeling that one's life is out of one's hands) are more attrition prone (Gregory 1995; Alexander et al. 1990; Kliewer and Sandler 1992; Holloway 1980).

Conversely, youth with positive life experiences, positive role models, high self-esteem, and an internal locus of control (self-control of one's destiny) have higher rates of retention in school and other programs (Gregory 1995; Alexander et al. 1990; Kliewer and Sandler 1992; Holloway 1980). Gregory examined urban youth and identified three main characteristics that differentiate "turn-around" youth vs. youth who will slip through the cracks. Turn-around youth are more likely to have positive elementary school experiences, a supportive person outside of the school setting, and the ability to see previous negative behaviors as an aberration, rather than viewing themselves as negative people (Gregory 1995). Youth who stay with programs, including school, often have a strong sense of their own value. They advocate a belief in the power of hard work to overcome obstacles and feel their education has value. They are far sighted and believe that their academic efforts will "pay off" in the long run (Floyd 1996). Floyd found that academic success "is largely attributable to three protective mechanisms: a supportive, nurturing family and home environment; the youths' interactions with and the involvement of committed, concerned educators and other adults in their lives; and the development of two key personality traits – perseverance and optimism." (Floyd 1996, pg. 181).

The ability to buffer stress seems to play an extremely important role in one's ability to maintain commitment to a program. Kliewer and Sandler (1992) found that different types of locus of control determine an individual's ability to buffer stress. They found that the higher the *internal* loci of control an individual has, the more likely the individual will appraise a given situation as reasonable and feel capable of coping with or taking control of it (i.e., assignments such as school work or job projects appear reasonable and less overwhelming). If the situation is truly uncontrollable, the individual with an *internal* locus of control will view the situation as less threatening. Those individuals who have an *external* locus of control see given situations as beyond their control, view their own lives as out of their control, and tend to view events as more negatively influencing them (Kliewer and Sandler 1992). These individuals will be more prone to missing deadlines, dropping projects, and leaving school and jobs altogether.

There seems to be agreement that antisocial youth are at greater risk of attrition. There are a subset of youth who are aggressive and resistant to authority and have a more difficult time adapting to new surroundings; they have constricted imaginative resources and cannot produce a

variety of responses to new foreign situations. Blechman argues, "When coping antisocially, youth are primarily concerned with short-term self-gratification" (Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas 1995, pg. 220). Their coping strategies include denial of responsibility for actions, projecting blame on others, physical aggression, externalizing behavior problems, risk-taking, and substance abuse. These coping strategies may inhibit their ability to adapt to the rules, responsibilities, and basic requirements of programmed living. As a consequence of their limited internal resources, they have constricted problem solving abilities, an inability to reason abstractly, look at neutral situations as hostile, and may lash out because they are afraid of being attacked (Davis and Boster 1992).

Blechman agrees with Davis and Boster's description of the aggressive youth. She states, "They believe that because others are out to get them they must retaliate in self-defense, that aggression is the best way of getting what they want, and that aggression is the only way to cope with social challenges" (Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas 1995, pg. 220). Davis contrasts the coping strategies of the aggressive, defiant youth with the more resilient youth. "Persons with an active imagination are able to produce a variety of responses to situations, the majority of which are nonviolent and are, as well, the result of considering such situations with complex, abstract reasoning" (Davis & Boster 1992, pg. 561). Mills, at the Center for Study of Law and Society at the University of Miami, points out that at-risk youth function habitually at more insecure levels than other youth (1988). These youth require more supportive interventions than their more adaptable counterparts in order to make it in a long-term program.

Adolescent psychiatrists van Strein, van der Ham and van Engeland (1992) found the dropouts to be more hostile, to have bigger egos, and to be prone to avoiding people who confront them with their problems. Alpert and Dunham (1986), in a study of 137 delinquent youth, found the highest predictors of dropout all related to school influences. These included "misbehavior in school" (number of times sent out of class and number of times getting high in school), liking or disliking school, and peer related factors (number of friends who dropped out and amount of trouble one's friends get into).

It may be assumed that younger participants have more difficulty adapting to new surroundings, and may therefore be more prone to dropout. However, Kliewer and Sandler (1992) describe how age may be a different factor in attrition. They found that older age is negatively correlated with relating to life events, symptoms, and locus of control beliefs. In

other words, the older one gets and the longer the duration of dealing with difficult situations, the more one loses the belief that he/she has the ability to make a change in his/her life and the greater the effect that negative events can have on him/her. It is important, however, to be aware that Kliewer and Sandler studied youth only until the age of 16.

Dropout in Selected Programs

Several programs' experience with dropout will be presented; however, their experience with attrition may be of varying relevance to Job Corps. First, there are differences in client populations in different types of programs (Cavin and Maynard 1985). Second, dependent on program goals, attrition rate may not properly assess its success or failure. To fairly determine the relative importance of program attrition to other program factors that influence participant success, one needs to compare the outcome (i.e., job placement, income, etc.) of those individuals who left a program early to those who stayed in the program.

School Dropout

An extensive literature exists that considers who drops out of school, what systemic problems fail to prevent dropout, and what efforts might turn the tide for individuals considering dropout. Because the majority of Job Corps students first fail the traditional school system, the educational literature is highly relevant to this report.

The National Center for Education Statistics of The U.S. Department of Education publishes an annual report on Dropout Rates (Kaufman et al. 1999). In "Dropout Rates in the United States: 1998," they report that 4.8% of youth over age 15 dropped out of school between October 1997 to October 1998. This contributed to the cumulative total of 11.8% of 16-24 year-olds who were dropouts. The percentage of dropouts varied little by gender but varied greatly by race: 29.5 percent of Hispanic youth, 13.8 percent of African-American youth, 7.7 percent of white youth, and 4.1% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth were dropouts. The sample was too small to offer percentages on Native American youth, but it is known that their rates of dropout are significantly higher than that of African-American or white students. (U.S. Department of Education 1993). Youth from families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent were four times as

likely as youth from the top 20 percent of incomes to drop out of high school (12.7% vs. 2.7%) (Kaufman et al. 1999).

In a 1993 report "Reaching the Goals: Goal 2- High School Completion," The Department of Education points out that while it is important to recognize risk groups, the majority of dropouts would be missed if we targeted only those groups. They offer the sophomore class of 1980 as an example; Of students who dropped out, 66% were white; 87% came from an English-speaking home; 68% came from two-parent families; 42% attended suburban high schools; 80% had no children or spouses; 60% had C averages or better; and 71% had never repeated a grade. Further, they alert us to the danger of overgeneralization when naively labeling a group as "at-risk" based upon raw mean values prior to controlling for other variables. For example, it is widely reported that dropout rates for African-Americans are higher than for whites. However, when African-Americans and whites from similar social backgrounds are compared, African-American rates are similar, if not lower, than those for whites.

This report notes that researchers are recognizing that dropping out is a process rather than a discrete event. "The reasons students commonly offer for leaving school – for example, low grades, inability to get along, working and pregnancy may not be the true causes, but rationalizations or simplifications of more complex circumstances" (U.S. Department of Education 1993, pg. 3). In a comprehensive literature review on dropping out of the educational system, Lawton supports dropout as a process (Lawton 1994). He cites the following four theories as means to conceptualize this process.

First, the *frustration-self esteem model* proposes that students who do poorly in school become frustrated as an initial step. Consequently, their self-image declines, and the cycle continues until they drop out either because they reject, or are rejected by, the school (Lawton 1994; Finn 1989). Many authors support the notion that "the act of rejecting an institution as fundamental to the society as school must be accompanied by the belief that the institution has rejected the person" (Welhage and Rutter 1986, pg. 385; Golden 1995, pg. 33).

Second, the *participation – identification model* suggests that involvement in social activities is protective because it results in identification with a group. The likelihood that a student will reach graduation is maximized if he or she actively participates in school-related activities (Lawton 1994; Finn 1989). Conversely, lack of participation may lead to isolation and a lack of identification. Marginalized students become alienated and ultimately drop out.

A third theory, *Deviance Theory*, proposes that individuals may be labeled as deviant if they fail to support an institution's norms. Once individuals receive that label, they begin to model label-appropriate behavior. They can find rewards in the label (e.g., being viewed as a rebel, as tough, or as too "cool" to care) that outweigh the rewards associated with being mainstream (Finn 1989; LeCompte and Dworkin 1991). Given that the mainstream has already alienated them, the rewards seem even more pronounced.

Deviance theory is important to take note of when considering removing "at-risk" students from the mainstream group for specialized risk-reduction interventions. First, the danger of social stigma exists when it becomes apparent to the mainstream group that a student has special needs (Rossi 1995). In a study of intensive group counseling for dropout prevention, the dangers of pulling out target groups was apparent (Catterall 1987). A dropout prevention program included 155 sophomore through senior students in an intensive four-day counseling workshop. After the intervention, students had a higher dropout rate than youth in the control group. It was suggested that the workshop may have created a cohesive peer group within the school "that looked to itself for sources of satisfaction in daily school life, but not to teachers or to regular school activities" (Catterall 1987, pg. 534).

There is a clear correlation found between delinquency, substance use and dropout. It is important to understand, however, that correlation is not the same as causation. Deviance theory might suggest that the same isolation and alienation that leads to dropout may also lead to delinquency (i.e., alienation or marginalization is the causative factor of both behaviors, rather than delinquency being the cause of dropout). In a study by Fagan and Pubon, serious delinquency was described for 42% of male dropouts vs. 16% of male students; violent activity was reported by 26% of male dropouts vs. 6% of male students; and 5% of dropouts used drugs or alcohol vs. 36% of all students (Fagan and Pabon 1990).

The *Strain Theory* recognizes that when a wide gap exists between the reality students live and the promises they are offered, students begin to see school-participation as meaningless, and teachers do not see the purpose of educating youth doomed to failure. Lecompte and Dworkin (1991) theorize that as societal changes reduce the fit between school and society, teachers and students begin to see their efforts as useless, and the process of dropout occurs without resistance. Conversely, Bickel and Papagiannis (1988) note that high school students are more likely to complete when it is clear to them that employability and income are linked to

graduation. "When a high school diploma promises improved economic opportunity, high school completion rates are enhanced. When a diploma seems irrelevant to post high school economic opportunities, completion rates are diminished" (Bickel and Papagiannis 1988, pg. 144). The Hispanic Dropout Project noted that a future promised via education did not look like realistic options to many of the nation's Hispanic Youth. Their reality revealed that dropouts working a couple of years were earning more by graduation age than their cohorts were earning after graduation (Secada et al 1998).

Retention within The United States Job Corps

The issue of retention within Job Corps has been of longstanding interest and has been raised in several United States General Accounting Office (U.S. GAO) reports in the last several years. In "Job Corps: Need for Better Enrollment Guidance and Improved Placement Measures" (U.S. GAO 1998a), the GAO analyzed national data on the 68,000 students enrolled during program year (PY) 1995. It explored characteristics of program participants and early dropouts.

Their report stated that in PY 1995, 15% of enrollees separated within 30 days of entry and more than 25% left by 60 days. Their study focused on 60-day retention in contrast to this report that considers 30-and 90-day retention. Their final report excluded race-ethnicity and gender to avoid any misperception that they were suggesting that applicant status should be determined based upon these characteristics. They found older participants were more likely to stay than younger participants: 21-25 year-olds were 37% more likely to remain in the program at 60 days than 15-17 year olds, and 18-20 year-olds were 20% more likely to remain in the program at 60 days than were 15-17 year olds. Participants with a need for Spanish-English Education, and other-English education were 1.90 and 3.15 times more likely to remain in the program than English speakers. Corpsmembers who lived less than 50 miles from the center were 1.14 times more likely to stay than members from a greater distance. High school graduates were more likely to stay than students with 0-8 years of education (Odds Ratio 1.82) or 9-11 years of education (OR 1.41). Participants with no dependents were 1.27 times more likely to stay in the program than were those with dependents. Other findings included better retention for youths who were in-school, youths who were out-of-school for less than a year, youths with prior military service, youths from locales with greater than 250,000 residents, and non-residential students.

The GAO acknowledged that their predictive model was limited by the variables available in SPAMIS records. "We were unable to include in the analysis measures of such things as student ability, attitude, and motivation, as well as other characteristics that could potentially affect the likelihood of participants remaining in the program for at least 60 days" (U.S. GAO 1998a, pg. 57). In addition, they note that some of the most useful predictors of 60-day retention represented small subsets of participants (e.g., need for bilingual education), and therefore were of limited utility. Further, the report notes that it would be inappropriate for The Department of Labor to use their quantitative results to select participants. It states, "If Labor chose to consider these characteristics in designing outreach efforts or establishing priorities for eligible applicants, it would be faced with the complexity of integrating these results with existing eligibility requirements and program policy" (U.S. GAO 1998a, pg. 15). Rather, the GAO authors state, "The most clear-cut use of this information on participant characteristics may be in designing efforts to improve the retention rate of participants with characteristics associated with leaving the program early" (U.S. GAO 1998a, pg. 15).

The report compensates for its inability to report on unmeasured student characteristics such as motivation and attitude by looking closely at the outreach and admissions staff who assess those characteristics. The report addressed the possibility that outreach and admission contractors were not adequately screening applicants to determine who had "the capability and aspiration to complete and secure the full benefits of Job Corps" (U.S. GAO 1998a, pg. 9). The researchers visited 13 contractors with notably high or low retention records. They found that those contractors with lower dropout rates – 10 percent or less – had procedures in place aimed at identifying applicants most suitable for Job Corps. They described "commitment checks" that successful contractors used to test applicants' suitability. These checks included application appointments, written assignments for students to describe their motivation for participation and their long-range goals, and required weekly check-in phone calls before enrollment. The researchers also found that many outreach and admissions contractors consider pre-enrollment tours of centers to be extremely useful, though not always practical. These tours were considered helpful because they erased false expectations by providing potential students the opportunity to observe the site. Further, it allowed them to familiarize themselves with rules and determine whether they were prepared for the highly structured environment at Job Corps. The

implication was that once students understood the rigorous demands that would be placed on them, only those most committed to and prepared for change would enroll.

Evaluators visited six Job Corps sites to produce "Job Corps: High Costs and Mixed Results Raise Questions about Program's Effectiveness" (U.S. GAO 1995). Program completion was among the variety of issues they explored. They noted that completing vocational training was very important to achieving a successful outcome. In the sites they visited, only a little more than one third of students completed their vocational courses. In response to this report, The Department of Labor noted that there were other program outcomes not explored by the GAO, including GED attainment and math and reading gain. In addition, Labor's response pointed out that vocational completion rates of Job Corps (42% in PY 94), while not ideal, were better than completion rates of community colleges (13%), and comparable to vocational-technical institutions (43%) as reported by The Department of Education in their National Assessment of Vocational Education Final Report to Congress, Volume II, June 1994 (U.S. GAO 1995, pg. 44).

A study of 125 Job Corps participants in a Southwestern Center by psychologists Gallegos and Kahn (1986) divided the participants into three categories: those that completed their program; those that stayed beyond 90 days but did not complete their program; and those that left before 90 days. Approximately 50% of enrollees at the center they studied left before 90 days. Gallegos and Kahn found the highest retention rates among those individuals who "engaged in a structured activity just before enrolling" and those participants who "estimate[d] a longer period of time necessary for training" (Gallegos and Kahn 1986, pg. 174). They also found that "the unsuccessful participants were those who were most likely to *endorse* wanting the center to be further from their home" (Gallegos and Kahn 1986, pg. 174). The researchers felt that this was probably a flag that these are the most troubled youth.

Terry Johnson and David Sommers (1998) explored length of stay within Job Corps. They used multiple regression analysis to determine factors' influence on length of stay. Their findings indicated that older students, minority students, those with more education, more advanced reading skills, and those in need of a bilingual program stay in the program longer. Job Corps students with dependents and those who were racially isolated on center had shorter lengths of stay (Johnson and Sommers 1998).

Battelle prepared a memo in December 1990 that explored "Profiles of Early Drop-Outs and Comparisons with Long-Term Stayers." Relative to long-term stayers, early dropouts were

more likely to be male, white, younger, less educated, to have dependents, and not to be from larger cities. It found that the characteristics of students who left within 30 days were similar to those who stayed 30-90 days, with the exception of white students who were more likely to leave early. Johnson stated, "this suggests, not surprisingly, that the factors that differentiate very early dropouts from those who stay 1-3 months are primarily unmeasured (e.g. attitude, motivation, employment opportunities outside Job Corps, family circumstances (Johnson 1990).

Mathematica is currently working on a national Job Corps study that should illuminate the effects of retention on outcomes. The information it includes will be of particular use because: 1) it will have more descriptive data than is currently available; 2) the data has been collected prospectively; 3) the study utilized experimental design including a control group; and 4) it will be able to compare outcomes between the control group, early leavers, and completers. (Terry Johnson, personal communication, 1/4/00).

Attrition in The Military

The Department of Defense has a strong financial incentive to decrease attrition. Approximately one-third of all new recruits leave military service before they fulfill their first term of enlistment. According to the GAO report "Military Attrition: Better Screening of Enlisted Personnel Could Save Millions of Dollars," (1997) it costs the services between $9,400 and $13,500 to recruit and train an enlistee. It is estimated that in fiscal year 1996, the military services spent $390 million on personnel who never made it to their duty stations.

In gleaning information from the military relevant to Job Corps, the reader should bear in mind the differences between the two programs. Both recruit a young-adult population, but Job Corps includes younger individuals. Further, Job Corps' mission is to serve the highest-risk population that can benefit from the program. At its core, Job Corps is designed to serve and better the individual participant. The fact that this service to individuals benefits society, through increased revenue, decreased criminality and decreased future public expenditures is a welcomed bonus that further justifies program expenditures. In contrast, the military recruits the highest-educated, lowest-risk population it is able to attract. Its purpose is to create a well-trained force of individuals who are prepared to defend the nation. Incentives are justified by the quality of the recruit it attracts and the better training forces it creates, not by the services that benefit the recruit. Therefore, whereas a partially completed program may partially meet the mission of Job

Corps (some improvement in students' reading skills, improved social skills, etc.), a recruit who leaves before they reach their first assignment does not fulfill the mission of the military at all.

First-term attrition has remained at 29 to 39% since 1974, varying between military branches. This has been surprising since recruit quality has increased in terms of education, and studies of attrition in the military have shown that persons with high school diplomas and above average Armed Forces Qualification Test scores have lower first-term attrition rates. In fiscal year 1992, enlistees with a high school diploma had an attrition rate of 33%, and those with GED certificates left at a rate of 46.3 %. Therefore, the steady attrition rate is assumed to be based on other factors that overpower the advantage of increased education among recruits.

Nearly half of first-term attrition in the military occurs during the first 6 months. Over 80% of these leavers were discharged because they were medically unqualified for service, failed to meet minimum performance criteria, had fraudulently or erroneously entered the military, or had character or behavior disorders. However, the report acknowledges that the data base used to precisely quantify and analyze attrition is incomplete and inconsistent. First, the four branches of the armed services interpret the separation codes differently. Therefore, enlistees with the same discharge circumstance are coded in different discharge categories. "For example, an enlisted person who cannot adapt to military life is separated from the Air Force for a personality disorder, from the Navy for an erroneous enlistment, and from the Army and the Marine Corps for failure to meet minimum performance standards" (U.S. GAO 1997a, pg. 6). Second, it notes that separation codes offer only the official reason for discharge. The GAO interviewed separating recruits and revealed that they often have many reasons for leaving, but only one "official" reason was recorded.

The military has concerns about long-term retention and reenlistment of its members because of the savings generated and the benefits of a more seasoned military. In an effort to retain members, the military strives to improve quality of life, particularly in the context of decreasing the stresses related to more frequent deployments and a more streamlined force. The GAO surveyed service members for areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (U.S. GAO 1999). However, more relevant to U.S. Job Corps are the efforts the GAO suggests to keep the enlistees engaged through basic training and toward their first points of duty (U.S. GAO 1997a, U.S. GAO 1997b, U.S. GAO 1998b, U.S. GAO 1998c, U.S. GAO 1999). Here, they primarily address recruitment and briefly address the importance of a respectful experience in training camp.

Official military policy in each service branch is to treat recruits with respect. Navy instructions state, "The training process must all times reflect respect for dignity and rights of the individual and provide a training environment which is free from all forms of abuse … the use of vulgar, obscene, profane, sexually-oriented, humiliating, or racially/ethnically – slanted language to address or refer to a trainee(s) directly or indirectly is prohibited" (U.S. GAO 1997b, pg. 43). Yet the report notes that one-third of the 126 recruits they interviewed told them that they were subjected to humiliating treatment and that this treatment contributed to their desire to leave the military (U.S. GAO 1997b). They acknowledge that this is anecdotal evidence only, and that it does not mean that humiliating treatment is widespread.

The GAO does make very concrete suggestions as to how recruiters could be better trained and supported to screen enlistees. Many of these suggestions could be directly related to Job Corps Outreach and Admissions Officers. The GAO noted that "In a sense, recruiters have a built-in conflict of interest. Although they are expected to recruit only fully-qualified personnel, their performance is judged primarily on the number of recruits they enlist per month. The recruiters' goals also are connected to the numbers of slots for basic and follow-on training. That is recruiters must keep a steady and constant flow of enlisted personnel into the services" (U.S. GAO 1997a, pg. 3). One suggestion the GAO made in response to this problem was to change the recruiters current monthly goal system to a quarterly goal system. They believed that this would remove some pressure to fill the quotas (and the possibility of filling them with under qualified enlistees) (U.S. GAO 1997a).

The GAO called for better screening for specific known problems, such as medical disability, behavioral deficits, and substance use. It also suggested that since poor physical conditioning was known to be associated with separation, the recruiters guide enlistees toward structured physical fitness training in delayed entry programs (U.S. GAO 1997a).

The evaluators also felt recruiters should be held more accountable for retention. They suggested a link between recruiter awards and the successful completion of basic training by their recruits. As of January, 1998 when the report was written, the Marine Corps and Navy linked recruiter success with retention, while the Army and Air Force did not (U.S. GAO 1997a).

The GAO report encouraged better selection of recruiters and ongoing training that would enhance their ability to selectively recruit enlistees who were likely to remain through basic training. The report notes that recruiters are selected from among the best noncommissioned

officers. However, only the Air Force screens these officers specifically for the communication skills needed to become an effective recruiter. Though it does not screen for communication skills, the Marine Corps devotes more than a full week to communication and leadership training. The report notes that not all services require recruiters to have ongoing interactions with drill instructors and recruiters. The report suggests that such interactions would offer recruiters better insight into the issues affecting retention (U.S. GAO 1997a, pg. 1). Similarly, the reports suggest that the recruiters have more time to tour basic training facilities so they would be better equipped to prepare enlistees for the realities of training.

Programmatic Recommendations Derived from Demonstration Efforts

The School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program

The United States Department of Education piloted 89 projects from 1989-1991 under The School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program. It then funded the American Institutes for Research to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs. Their 1995 report synthesized which strategies were effective (Rossi 1995). They made five general recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Put the services in rather than pull the students out. Projects that pulled at-risk students out of the classroom for special services had poorer outcomes. Rather, reorganizing the general classroom approach was more effective. The investigators pointed out the stigma associated with being "pulled –out" of the classes as well as the missed required work.

Recommendation 2: Deliver the services without calling attention to the fact that special services are being provided.

Again, the stigma associated with being removed from routine classrooms created negative outcomes. The institute found that better outcomes were realized when programs entirely avoided ability grouping as a prerequisite for receiving special services. For example, when adult mentors existed in the classroom to shepherd at-risk students, it appeared that they were there for all students.

Recommendation 3: Deliver the services within a supportive climate that includes adults as student advocates.

"This theme of care, concern, and advocacy, which also runs consistently through the literature on working with students at risk was a common thread among the SDDAP demonstrations that achieved positive student outcomes" (Rossi 1995, pg. 10).

Recommendation 4: Provide students with substantive incentives to participate

The institute noted that, at the high school level, those projects that retained students in school provided paid-work and vocational training opportunities for students who remained enrolled. They point out that these incentives are not in lieu of supporting youth to be internally motivated to perform well in school. Rather, the incentives may be pivotal in the absence of such internal motivations, as a means to create the opportunity to begin to internalize school-related values.

Recommendation 5: Carefully select, train, and support staff providing the services

Dropout prevention efforts that selected staff carefully and provide initial staff orientation that was more than a description of the project were more successful. "Following orientation, these projects continue to provide skill-building opportunities, counseling, problem-solving sessions, and motivational aids to staff to maintain necessary focus on key goals and necessary interests and abilities in providing services. These types of staff supports appear particularly important when the prevention program involves the combination of various services (e.g., when the program is comprehensive), and they seem to become critical when the program represents a new direction from the more traditional, regular school program" (Rossi 1995, pg. 11).

The report also addressed the factors needed to sustain innovative approaches. First, there had to be a team spirit among staff to reinforce staff commitment to the program. Strategies to build this camaraderie included providing staff with the time to talk, plan and compare notes. The team approach instilled a sense of joint ownership in the projects; in fact, team members were enlisted as planners and evaluators of the program. Second, staff were

challenged to pursue dropout prevention as a goal. This sense of challenge was noted to keep staff motivated. The authors noted that providing release time for training and staff development sessions and publicizing program achievements kept all staff aware of the challenge. Third, emphasis was placed on establishing connections between new and existing programs to minimize the danger of new programs being isolated.

Office of Vocational and Adult Education: Cooperative Demonstration Program

The Office of Vocational and Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education initiated a three-year demonstration program to demonstrate vocational education as a means to encourage youth at risk to remain in or return to school. In 1995, the Research Triangle Institute and American Institutes for Research published an evaluation of the ten grantees work (total of 12 projects) (Hayward and Tallmadge 1995). In sum, only four of the 12 projects demonstrated a reduction in dropout compared to a control group. Other untargeted outcomes were more impressive (10/12 demonstrated an increase in grade point average, 7/12 demonstrated reduction in failed courses and 7/12 increased students' perception of school safety).

The researchers noted that the modest positive outcomes reflected the difficulty of altering the effects of many years of "unproductive-often painful-educational experiences for their youth" (Hayward and Tallmadge 1995, pg. 5-1). Summary findings relevant for Job Corps included recognizing the important role of integrating academic and vocational curricula. Even demonstration projects that initially had no intention of including academic support found that it became a necessary component of the project. Second, the evaluators noted the importance of personal supports. Successful projects recognized that they were working with students who had experienced years of school-related failure and frustration. Therefore, many of the projects provided adult supports beyond the classroom including group counseling, guidance counselors, and mentoring. Additionally, all of the projects recognized that students needed support for their personal concerns. It noted that vocational training naturally creates an opportunity for skilled instructors to offer supports that might not be as plausible in traditional classrooms. In contrast to the typical academic classroom setting, vocational classes are small, students work in teams, collaboration is the norm, and the instructor functions as a "supervisor."

The evaluation of these 12 projects found that it was difficult to determine whether vocational programming in itself was an effective dropout prevention strategy. However, the

evaluators noted what project components held promise for improving persistence and educational success of at-risk youth. Drawing directly from their conclusion, they stated that the components which appear critical are the following:

- a smaller, more personal environment, such as that available in the school within-a-school and alternative school environments;
- vocational education, preferably that contains integration of academics with the vocational content, and, for most participants, has an occupational concentration leading to good entry-level jobs or continued training at the post secondary level;
- a formal counseling component that incorporates attention to personal issues along with career counseling, employability development, and life skills instruction;
- formal, ongoing coordination of the academic and vocational components of participants' high school programs;
- a structured environment that includes clear and equitably enforced behavioral expectations; and
- personal, supportive attention from adults, through a mentoring or other project component (Hayward and Tallmadge 1995, pg. 5-18,19).

The Hispanic Dropout Project

It is widely accepted that no solution will fit all youth. There is growing attention to the importance of a multicultural approach that both recognizes the strengths of cultures and targets interventions specifically toward cultures. The Hispanic Dropout Project's attention to cultural-specific issues, including the challenges of institutional racism and overcoming the dangers of ethnic stereotyping, merits inclusion in this report as an example of efforts to meet the specific needs of currently disenfranchised groups.

In reaction to the particularly alarming rates of Hispanic student school dropout, the Department of Education commissioned the Hispanic Dropout Project. In " No more Excuses, The Final Report of the Hispanic Dropout Project," project members suggest what schools, communities, parents, and students need to do to turn the tide of high school dropout (Secada et

al. 1998). To not dilute the urgency communicated in the report, this review will draw many quotations directly from the report. The report summarizes reasons for students leaving school:

> Some left because they felt that other life options were more viable; others left because they felt that they were being pushed out; and still others left because of family obligations. Yet almost all these students left school because no one had established individual relationships with each of them, communicated high academic expectations to them, and provided them with meaningful opportunities to achieve those expectations. (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 2)

> Dropping out is not a random act. According to some observers, school dropout is the logical outcome of the social forces that limit Hispanics' roles in society. Many Hispanic students live in the nation's most economically distressed areas. They attend overcrowded schools in physical disrepair and with limited educational materials. They see the devastating effects of their elders' limited employment opportunities and job ceilings. Hispanic students encounter stereotypes, personal prejudice, and social bias that is often part of larger anti-immigrant forces in this society. For many Hispanics, the United States does not appear to be a society of opportunities. Not surprisingly, faced with evidence of lingering institutional bias against Hispanics-these students figure: *The American Dream is not for me. Why bother?* And, of course, they drop out (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 7).

> *"I got throwed out, mainly." Arnie (former 10th-grade student).* In Cairns, R.B., & Cairns, B.D. (1994). *Lifelines and risks: Pathways of youth in our time* (p.167). New York: Cambridge University Press (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 10).

The report claims that stereotypes have created self-fulfilling prophecies among students and that teachers/schools expectations of Hispanic youth are low due to unfounded stereotypes. Stereotypes have blamed Hispanic students for dropping out of school by suggesting "they do not care about school, do not want to learn, do not come to school ready to learn, use drugs, belong to gangs, engage in violence, cannot achieve, have cultural backgrounds that are incompatible with schools, do not know English, are illegal immigrants, and in general, do not merit help or to be taken seriously" (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 13).

Alternative stereotypes, damaging by their paternalism, portray Hispanic students as victims of an environment out of control. These stereotypes portray Hispanic students as poor, the children of drug users, and as victims of violence and abuse. Further, because they do not speak (read or write) English well, they consistently encounter cultural barriers in school or in the larger society. Ultimately as the essential victim, unable to change these conditions, they cannot help but to drop out of school.

Parallel stereotypes disempower Hispanic parents' from active engagement in their children's education. The report quotes Larson and Rumberger:

> There were deep chasms in the relationship and communication between school and home. School personnel had many negative misconceptions about the motivations and values of parents. There was widespread belief that parents did not sufficiently value education and that they were unwilling to give sufficient time to rearing their children and participating in school activities. On the other hand, we found most parents to be fearful and alienated from school authorities while at the same time assigning exercise and responsibility to school personnel for educating their children. However, when parents were approached with a genuine desire to serve them and their family, we found that almost all parents were exceedingly open to suggestion and to becoming more involved in directing their adolescent and monitoring school performance. **Parents, far more than school or community personnel, were willing to implement suggestions from project researchers.**
>
> In Larson, K., & Rumberger, R. (1995). ALAS, *Achievement for Hispanics through academic success* (Dropout prevention and intervention project targeting middle school youth with learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders at risk for dropping out of school. Project evaluation: 1990-1995), p. A66 (emphasis added by project authors) (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 21).

Beyond stereotypes, the report speaks to the reality of the disconnect many poor Hispanic students feel between an education and an improved future. Students are told that completing high school leads to enhanced opportunities-such as a good job, a military career, or postsecondary education. But, for many Hispanic students, these futures don't look like realistic options. Instead, they see that new graduates earn less than their classmates who dropped out and have been working a couple of years.

The report looked also at success – and what led to success. It stated that students who stayed in school "often pointed to someone in that school – a teacher, coach, some other school staff member, someone from the larger community-whose personal interest in their finishing school nurtured their individual sense of self-worth and supported their efforts to stay in school" (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 16).

> What seemed to distinguish teachers who made a difference from those who did not was that the former teachers used knowledge of Hispanic students' academic, social, and psychological characteristics as a foundation and a source of competence on which to build. These teachers passionately believed that, because of their teaching and personal concern for their students, they made a difference in their students' lives. Students and parents agreed (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 25).
>
> Students reported that teachers who really cared about them as individuals often provided them with the inspiration and personal support needed to get through hard times. When asked why they stayed in school, students (many with friends who had dropped out of school) pointed to a teacher or other school person as having taken a special interest in them and nurtured their dreams for the future (Secada et al. 1988, pg.26).

The report also notes that, in sharp contrast to damaging stereotypes based on culture or race, teachers or programs that honor culture and that make curriculum "real" to youth meet with greater success. "Many programs are also providing young people with choice and "voice" regarding program operation, and, in response to the racial and ethnic diversity of adolescents, many practitioners incorporate cultural traditions and values into programs." In Panel on High-Risk Youth, National Research Council. (1993). *Losing generations: Adolescents in high-risk settings (p.219).* Washington, DC: National Academy Press (Secada et al. 1998, pg. 18).

In summary, The Hispanic Dropout Project found five key characteristics of schools that make a difference in their student's education and in students remaining in school. "*First,* these schools have very high academic and behavioral standards for their students. *Second*, they communicate those standards clearly, and they provide access to and support students in meeting those standards-that is, they provide students with many opportunities to succeed in meeting these high standards. *Third*, schools that make a difference connect their students in meaningful ways to adults. In spite of their size, secondary schools can adopt strategies. Examples of effective strategies are having a school within a school, a group of teachers accepting responsibility for the same students, everyone on staff agreeing to "adopt" some students, older students mentoring younger students-to increase the personalization that students need to experience. *Fourth*, these schools connect their students to possible futures in college and the work force. *Fifth*, they provide families with useful information about how their children are doing and about their futures. Rather than accepting the myth that parents do not care, good schools adopt the position that parents need information in order to make informed decisions that affect their children. Aspirations are not enough. For schools to make a difference, they must provide ways for students and their families to achieve those aspirations" (Secada et al. 1998, pg.33).

CHAPTER 2 – QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Introduction

To gain an in-depth understanding of retention within The United States Job Corps, several questions need to be addressed. Which students leave and which remain in the program? Why do students drop out? When do students leave? What might be done to retain more students? This chapter uses the Job Corps database to explore these questions.

Job Corps gathers extensive data on the nearly 70,000 students per year who participate in the program. These data contain a wealth of information on the students, including sociodemographic descriptors, their educational and work histories, and some descriptors of their home environment. In addition, it contains some of their program experiences (e.g., where they were placed, how long they waited to be placed, residential vs. nonresidential status, etc.). Finally, it records outcomes for all students, including their length of stay, competencies they achieved, and the reason they separated from the program.

The ability of the quantitative data to explore each of the above primary questions varies by question. For example, existing data describe how many students drop out and their length of stay. As the data reveal associations between students, their experience in the program, and length of stay, we can begin to describe which students drop out and the reasons they do so. It is important, however, to understand the limitations of the answers quantitative data can produce. The challenge of describing "in which" students an outcome occurs is in carefully and fairly categorizing students and their experiences. To best answer the primary questions relevant to retention, the database would need to include rich descriptors of students as well as a detailed log of their experiences and interactions on center. The generation of such a database would be challenging. The current database is extensive and begins to answer important questions. However, existing sociodemographic descriptors only begin to describe the students of Job Corps and their experiences.

In an effort to more fully explore the factors that influence retention, this report uses a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach. The qualitative data presented in Chapter 3 are an important supplement to these data as they attempt to explore some of the unmeasured factors not available for analysis here.

This project's primary objective is to explore program attrition and retention. Therefore, the focus of this analysis considers retention at 30 and 90 days after enrollment. However, because data was also available on students' final achievement outcomes, this analysis also considers GED and vocational completion.

Data Source

Data for this report was obtained from The Student Pay and Allowance Management Information System (SPAMIS) Data Center. Student descriptive data derive from the ETA 652, a form filled in by outreach and admissions counselors and entered into the Outreach and Admissions Student Input System (OASIS). Data from the Capability and Aspirations Tool (CAAT) used by admissions counselors to assess student commitment, motivation, and readiness for the program were not available for this analysis. Outcome data, including date of separation and competencies achieved was reported by center administrators to SPAMIS.

Table 1 lists all the variables which were considered for the analysis to predict retention and completion. Not all variables were included in the analysis. There were two main reasons for excluding variables from analysis. One was lack of variability. For example, if only 1% of the students had prior military service, then prior military service cannot be included as a global predictor of retention. Even if it were a statistically significant predictor (highly unlikely from a statistical viewpoint), it would not be helpful to identify such an association since it impacts a very small group. The second reason to exclude a variable was if it was confounded to the outcome variable. For example, total pay days is so related with length of stay that concluding that more paid days is predictive of retention would not be meaningful. Variables such as these are outcome variables rather than predictors of retention.

Table 1. Variables Considered for Use in the Job Corps Data Analysis

Variable	Comment
Region	
Sex	
Race	
Age	Years
Marital status	
Size of student's home community	
Student is a legal resident	99% yes, not used in further analysis
HS diploma before Job Corps	Subsumed in GED variable
Months out of school	
Last grade completed	
GED status	
Weeks unemployed	
Public assistance	
Minimum wage before Job Corps	
Prior military service	1%, not used in further analysis
Prior convictions	4%, not used in further analysis
Student relation to their family	
No. of people in student's residence	
No. of dependents	
Student participating in child care plan	8%, not used in further analysis
Participate in a Job Corps day care	1%, not used in further analysis
Need for a bilingual education	
Disruptive home life	
Culturally deprived	
Living in a high crime area	
Meet limited job opportunity eligibility	92%, not used in further analysis
Home unhealthy or unsafe	
Type of Job Corps enrollment for student	Administrative, not used in further analysis
Student eligible for an allotment	98% missing, not used in analysis
Student resident on campus of Job Corps	
Regional waiver required for the student	4%, not used in further analysis
Serious illness or injury	1%, not used in further analysis
Previous treatment for mental disorder	1%, not used in further analysis
Current health problems	2%, not used in further analysis
Student had health insurance	
Termination status	
Completed vocational training	
Length of stay	Time between enrollment date and last status date
Time from interview to enrollment	Time between interview date and enrollment date
Vocational waiting time	Time between arrival date and vocational start date
Site of location	
Screening agency on site	
Received PPEP bonus within 60 days	Outcome, not used in logistic regression
Initial Reading TABE	
Initial Math TABE	
Total pay days	Outcome, not used in logistic regression
Total non-pay days	Lack of variability, not used in logistic regression,
Home distance from Job Corps	25% missing, not used in logistic regression

Total Student Population: Description and Analyses

The data used in this report were from all Job Corps Centers. Between 7/1/93 and 12/31/98, there were 343,097 students who enrolled in the Job Corps Program. Records from all students will be used for analysis, without distinction between program year of enrollment.

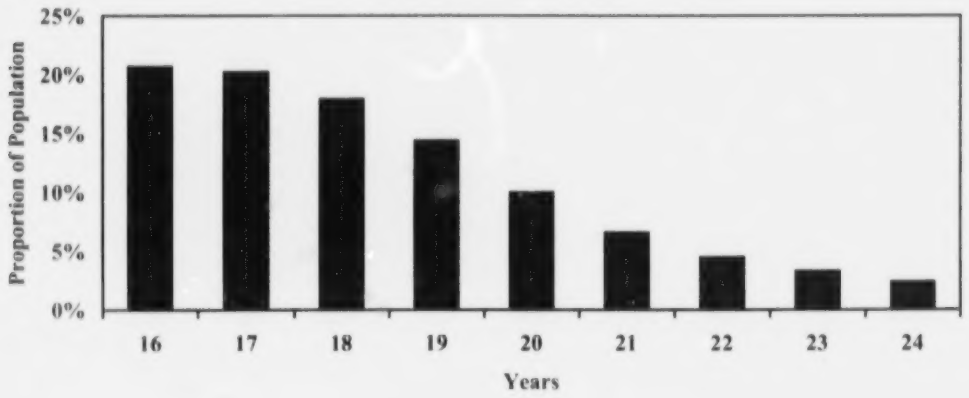
Demographics

Demographic characteristics of students are shown in Table 2. The Job Corps centers belong to nine geographical regions with 15,132 to 72,060 students assigned per region over the five year period. The majority of students (86%) were residents on Job Corps centers. Sixty percent of students were male, 50% were African-American, 28% were Caucasian, 16% were Hispanic, 4% were Native American, and 2% were Asian or Pacific Islander. Students were between 16 and 24 years of age at enrollment with approximately 40% of students being younger than 18 years old at entry. The proportion of students enrolling in Job Corps decreases as a function of age (Figure 1). One-quarter of students were from communities with populations less than 10,000 people, and almost 40% were from cities with populations of 250,000 or more.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Job Corps Population

	N	%
Region		
01	15,132	4.4
02	26,298	7.7
03	72,060	21.0
04	53,863	15.7
05	30,919	9.0
06	52,145	15.2
07/ 08	41,083	12.0
09	30,649	8.9
10	20,948	6.1
JC residential status		
Nonresident	46,596	13.6
Resident	296,501	86.4
Gender		
Female	136,802	39.9
Male	206,295	60.1
Race		
African-American	170,660	49.7
Caucasian	96,797	28.2
Hispanic	54,221	15.8
Native American	13,022	3.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	8,397	2.4
Age (years)		
16	70,917	20.7
17	69,203	20.2
18	61,428	17.9
19	49,319	14.4
20	34,293	10.0
21	22,555	6.6
22	15,565	4.5
23	11,264	3.3
24	8,317	2.4
Missing	236	0.1
Population size of student's home community		
Under 2500	48,062	14.1
2500 to 9999	36,489	10.7
10k to 49k	66,671	19.5
50k to 249k	61,222	17.9
250k and over	129,231	37.8
Missing	1,422	0.1

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Job Corps Population



Education

Educational characteristics of students are presented in Table 3. Prior to joining Job Corps, 21% of the students obtained a high-school diploma, and approximately one-third of the students were out of school for more than one year. The distribution of the highest grade completed by students prior to their enrollment is displayed in Figure 2, and the time since last school enrollment is shown in Figure 3. Approximately 15% of the population did not begin a high school education, and there are 74,237 (22%) students who completed grade 12 or higher (consistent with the data for the number of high school graduates). There are no substantial differences between the number of students with 9^{th}, 10^{th}, 11^{th} or 12^{th} grade education. Approximately 65% have been out of school for less than a year. Only 8% enrolled in Job Corps while still in school. Among students without a high school diploma when they enter Job Corps, 72,844 (22%) students obtained their GED or high school diploma at Job Corps. Vocational training was completed at Job Corps by 134,195 (39%) students.

Table 3. Educational Characteristics of the Job Corps Population

	N	%	Cumulative %
High School Diploma Prior To Job Corps			
No	269,524	78.7	
Yes	73,078	21.3	
Missing	495	0.1	
Length of time since last school enrollment			
In school now	25,762	7.6	7.6
1 month	40,832	12.0	19.6
2 months	23,357	6.9	26.4
3 months	26,310	7.7	34.1
4 months	16,260	4.8	38.9
5 months	9,946	2.9	41.8
6 months	16,974	5.0	46.8
7-12 months	63,766	18.7	65.5
13-18 months	17,706	5.2	70.7
19-24 months	36,039	10.6	81.3
25-36 months	28,486	8.4	89.7
37-47 months	3,822	1.1	90.8
48-59 months	14,553	4.3	95.1
60-71 months	8,987	2.6	97.7
>72 months	7,742	2.3	100.0
Missing	2,555	0.7	
Highest grade completed			
≤6th	742	0.8	0.8
7th	6,472	1.9	2.7
8th	43,696	12.7	15.4
9th	80,049	23.3	38.8
10th	76,116	22.2	61.0
11th	59,412	17.3	78.3
12th	73,206	21.3	99.6
Post high school training	1,031	0.3	99.9
Missing	373	0.1	100.0
GED status			
Already had HS diploma/GED	74,540	22.9	
Obtained GED/HS diploma at Job Corps	72,844	22.4	
Eligible, but did not (yet) obtain GED	74,276	22.9	
Ineligible/unqualified for GED	103,313	31.8	
Missing	18,124	5.3	
Need for student in bilingual program			
Spanish/ English	6,941	2.0	
None	329,981	96.4	
Other	5,373	1.6	
Vocational level			
Completed vocational training	134,195	39.1	
Did not (yet) complete vocational training	208,779	60.9	
Missing	123	0.04	

Figure 2. Highest Grade Completed

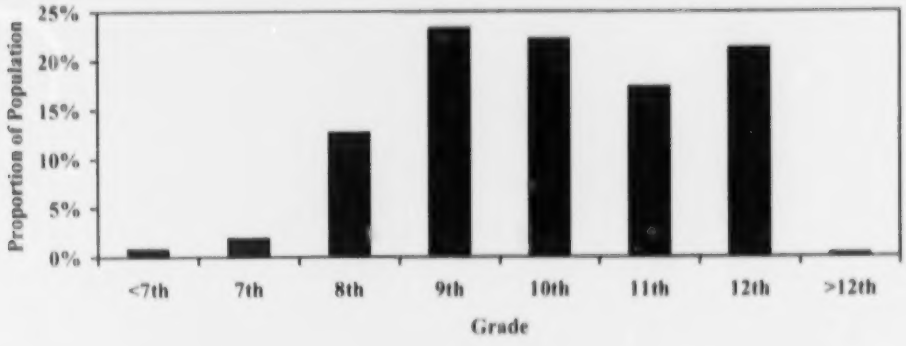
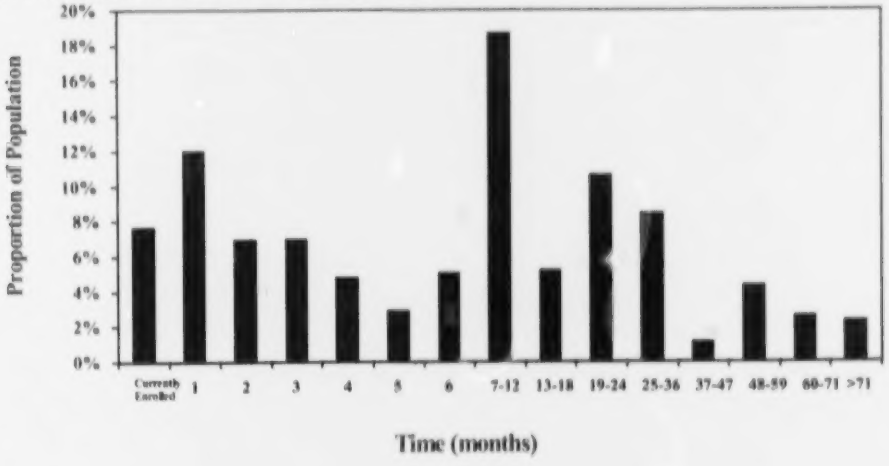


Figure 3. Months Since Last Enrolled in School



Socio-Demographic and Socio-Economic Information

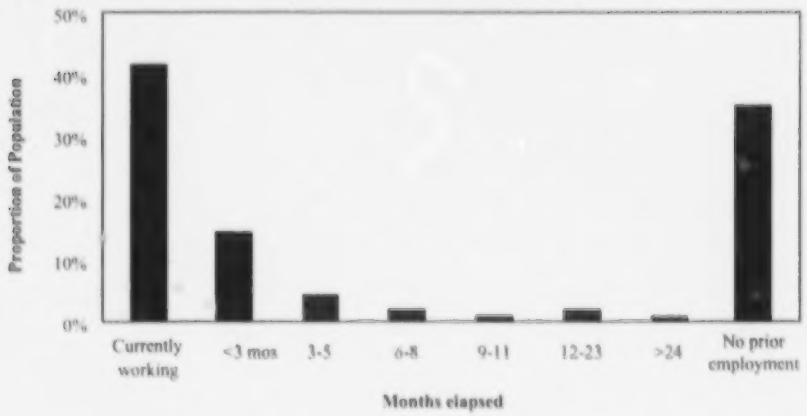
Student characteristics regarding living situation and employment status are presented in Table 4. Prior to coming to Job Corps, one-third of students were living alone, and 75% were living in a household of four people or less. Only 1% were living in a household with ten or more people. Eighty-eight percent of students report having no dependents, while 11% have one or two dependents, and 1% have more than two dependents. For the purpose of summarizing the data, there were certain circumstances where the data are assumed to be erroneous (e.g., when the number of people in the student's residence was reported as being higher than 50 or when the number of dependents was greater than 12).

Thirty-five percent of students have never worked, 14% report less than three months since their last full-time employment, and 42% were working when they enrolled at Job Corps. Figure 4 illustrates the time since the students had last worked. Close to 40% of students receive some form of public assistance.

Table 4. Student Socio-Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics

	N	%	Cumulative %
Number of people living in student's residence			
1	115,404	33.8	33.8
2	37,795	11.1	44.9
3	52,937	15.5	60.4
4	51,193	15.0	75.4
5	38,335	11.2	86.6
6	22,108	6.5	93.1
7	11,190	3.3	96.3
8	6,087	1.8	98.1
9	2,884	0.8	99.0
10+	3,479	1.0	100.0
Number of individuals dependent upon student			
0	289,494	88.4	88.4
1	26,097	8.0	96.3
2	8,344	2.5	98.9
3	2,387	0.7	99.6
4+	1,064	0.3	99.9
Length of time since last full-time employment (months)			
No prior employment	115,146	34.8	
<3 months	47,601	14.4	
3-5 months	513,855	4.2	
6-8 months	86,049	1.8	
9-11 months	2,547	0.8	
12-23 months	6,357	1.9	
>24 months	1,883	0.6	
Currently working	137,004	41.5	
Missing	12,655	3.7	
Public assistance			
No	211,923	61.8	
Yes	73,138	21.3	
Other assistance	57,797	16.9	
Missing	239	.1	

Figure 4. Time Elapsed Since Last Full-Time Employment



Student Separation

Completion and Separation Codes

Reasons for separation as coded by center administrators are given in Table 5. Almost one quarter of the population left AWOL and another one quarter received disciplinary terminations. Thirteen percent resigned from the program and four percent left for medical reasons. Administrators noted that thirty percent completed the program. It is important to note that "completion" here is different than the definition used in the rest of this analysis. This analysis defines completion in terms of attainment of GED and/or vocation. In Table 7, it is therefore noted that 45% of the population were completers. The discordance in numbers of students considered completers may be explained by administrators labeling someone a completer only if they had completed both GED and vocation.

Table 5. Completion and Separation Codes

	N	%
AWOL	76,178	24.5
Disciplinary termination	77,385	24.9
Resigned	39,176	12.6
Medical	12,511	4.0
30 day probation	1,528	0.5
Administrative withdrawal	2,693	0.9
Parental consent	4,057	1.3
Death	102	0.0
Incarcerated	211	0.1
Military duty	130	0.0
Disciplinary appeal	7	0.0
Other/ Unknown	106	0.0
Terminated/ Fraudulent admit	1,554	0.5
Completer	94,598	30.4
Completer/ Maximum benefit	728	0.2
Missing	32,133	9.4

*Note: In this case, "completer" refers to administrative completer, and is not related to whether the student obtained a GED and/or completed a vocation.

Zero Tolerance for Illegal Substance and Violence

Job Corps implemented the zero tolerance (ZT) policy for illegal substances and violence on November 1, 1994. Of students enrolled after that date, 6.1% were separated for zero tolerance infractions. Prior to 11/1/94 these infractions were coded as disciplinary separations only, after that date they were coded as ZT separations as well as disciplinary. Of the 77,385 disciplinary separations noted in Table 4 15,530 (20%) were ZT separations. Of the students enrolled after 11/1/94, 6.7% were discharged for ZT violations.

Total Program Days of Early Dropouts Compared to Completers

One of the reasons attrition is a concern to all programs is the proportion of resources used by students who are unlikely to derive any benefit from the program. For the purpose of the following analysis, the assumption was made that students who leave Job Corps before 90 days have derived little program benefit. Records were analyzed for students who entered Job Corps between January 1, 1996 and December 31, 1996. This cohort was selected because it included the most recent group of students that all would have had adequate time (2 years) to complete the program. People were followed until they left the program. In calendar year 1996, 69,800 students enrolled in the program. Of these students, 24,188 (35%) left before 90 days, and

23,639 (34%) completed the program (completion here is defined by the more conservative administrative standard). This cohort of students stayed in the program an aggregate total of 14,078,455 days, averaging 6 ½ months (202 days) per student. Students who left before 90 days stayed for a total of 983,645 days (41 days on average). Thus, the total program days used by these early leavers accounted for 7% of the total days used by the cohort. Students who completed the program stayed for a total of 8,264,771 days (350 days on average). Completers, therefore, accounted for 59% of the total days used by the cohort. Students complete their programs successfully starting at approximately six or seven months after enrollment through the allowed two years (Table 6). It is clear, therefore, that when the greatest percentages of loss are occurring, it is from students dropping out.

The gross percentage of students who leave the program early is a figure that could readily enter into a discussion of wasted resources. This figure if used alone, holds the potential of overstating the waste. In fact, while 35% of students in this cohort left early, they used only 7% of the total days Job Corps invested in all 1996 enrollees. It is beyond the scope of this analysis to determine the increased expense of orientation days, as well as the expense of the outreach and admission process. Suffice it to say that not all days utilize equal expenditures, and orientation days may be among the most expensive. Therefore, operating on the assumption that early dropouts derive no benefit, the true waste of resources should be estimated somewhere above 7%, but not approaching 35%.

Table 6. Trends in Separation from Program over Time

Month	1	2	3	4	5,6	7,8	9,10	11,12	13,14	15,16	17,18	19,20	21,22	23,24	24+
% of total population separated during period	13.8	11.3	9.1	8.3	12.6	11.8	9.2	6.4	4.7	3.5	2.3	1.6	1.2	1.0	2.2
% of remaining population separated during period	13.8	13.1	12.1	12.5	21.9	26.3	27.8	26.7	27.0	27.1	24.5	22.7	22.6	23.8	100
% of remaining population separated for AWOL or discipline	64.7	75.0	72.7	69.1	60.3	38.0	24.5	18.8	14.7	12.3	9.6	8.6	7.2	4.9	35.6
% of remaining population separated for resignation	18.9	15.9	16.7	16.4	14.1	10.4	9.5	6.7	5.4	6.5	3.6	4.3	3.5	1.3	9.5
% of remaining population separated for completion	0.0	0.0	2.3	6.5	14.9	46.9	62.1	70.6	77.8	79.6	84.5	85.6	87.5	92.5	66.2

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Sample of Student Population: Description and Analyses

Selecting Samples for Analyses

If the dataset of 343,097 cases were analyzed, all explored variables would likely appear significant because statistical significance is somewhat a function of the sample size. It would be impossible to distinguish between important and spurious results. Therefore, a 10% sample of the full population stratified by region, age, and race was taken. In Regions 1-8, we sampled 50% of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans in order to get large enough subgroups of these smaller groups. A validation sample was obtained in the same manner. Table 7 shows that the sampling process successfully created two representative samples from the population.

Defining Outcome Variables

Three outcome variables were used in this analysis; two based on retention, and one on completion. The two retention outcome variables were 30-day and 90-day retention. Completion of either GED and/or vocational training while at Job Corps was used as the completion outcome. The outcome variables are summarized in Table 8.

Approximately 87% of students in the analysis sample continued in the program beyond the initial 30 days, and approximately two-thirds continued beyond 90 days. Of the 15,345 (49%) students who obtained their GED and/or completed vocational training while at Job Corps, 26% completed vocational training only, 17% completed both vocational training and GED, and 6% completed GED only. Of the 13,443 students who completed vocation only, 3,942 (29%) had a GED prior to coming to Job Corps, and 1,795 (13%) were not eligible to enroll in the GED program. Thus, more than half of those completing vocational training could also have potentially enrolled and completed their GED.

Table 7. Characteristics of the Population, Analysis Sample, and Validation Sample.

Variable	Population N (%)	Analysis N (%)	Validation N (%)
Sex			
Female	136,802 (40%)	12,351 (40%)	12,409 (39%)
Male	206,295 (60%)	18,923 (60%)	19,060 (61%)
Age			
16-17 years	140,120 (40%)	12,417 (40%)	12,450 (41%)
18-20 years	145,040 (42%)	12,741 (41%)	12,828 (42%)
21-25 years	57,701 (17%)	5,227 (17%)	5,299 (17%)
Race			
African-American	170,660 (50%)	15,160 (49%)	15,215 (48%)
Caucasian	96,797 (28%)	9,567 (31%)	9,688 (31%)
Hispanic	54,221 (16%)	4,690 (15%)	4,708 (15%)
Native American	13,022 (4%)	1,123 (4%)	1,125 (4%)
Asian	8,397 (2%)	734 (2%)	733 (2%)
Public Assistance			
Yes	73,138 (21%)	6,990 (22%)	6,993 (22%)
No	211,923 (62%)	19,040 (61%)	19,257 (61%)
Other	57,797 (17%)	5,244 (17%)	5,219 (17%)
Highest grade completed			
< 9	50,910 (15%)	4,920 (16%)	4,917 (16%)
9-12	289,814 (85%)	26,328 (84%)	26,528 (84%)
30-day Retention			
Yes	296,000 (86%)	27,170 (87%)	27,399 (87%)
No	47,097 (14%)	4,104 (13%)	4,070 (13%)
90-day Retention			
Yes	219,341 (64%)	21,142 (68%)	21,162 (67%)
No	123,756 (36%)	10,132 (32%)	10,307 (33%)
Completed GED and/or VOC			
Yes	155,376 (45%)	15,381 (49%)	15,324 (49%)
No	187,721 (55%)	15,929 (51%)	16,145 (51%)
Region			
01	15,132 (4%)	1,519 (5%)	1,545 (5%)
02	26,298 (8%)	2,343 (8%)	2,368 (8%)
03	72,060 (21%)	6,399 (20%)	6,422 (20%)
04	53,863 (16%)	4,902 (16%)	4,924 (16%)
05	30,919 (9%)	2,930 (9%)	2,948 (9%)
06	52,145 (15%)	4,784 (15%)	4,801 (15%)
07/ 08	41,083 (12%)	3,867 (12%)	3,890 (12%)
09	30,649 (9%)	2,657 (8%)	2,678 (9%)
10	20,948 (6%)	1,873 (6%)	1,893 (6%)

Table 8. Retention and Completion Summary in Analysis Sample

	N	%
30 Days		
Dropped out	4,104	13.1%
Retained	27,170	86.9%
90 Days		
Dropped out	10,132	33.4%
Retained	21,142	67.7%
Completion (GED/VOC)		
Completed	15,345	49.1%
Did not complete	15,929	50.9%
GED at Job Corps		
Obtained at Job Corps	7,171	22.9%
Did not obtain at Job Corps	17,078	54.6%
(Obtained elsewhere/prior to Job Corps)*	(7,025)	(22.5)%
VOC Completion		
Completed	13,443	43.0%
Did not complete	17,831	57.0%

*Note: Students who already completed their GED prior to their arrival at Job Corps were not eligible for the regression exploring GED Completion while at Job Corps.

Early Leavers Versus Late Completers

To better understand the reasons for leaving, we charted the number of students in the sample over time, by their reason for separation. Figure 5 illustrates the timing of separation by reason for leaving. In the first month, disciplinary terminations predominate, followed by AWOL status and resignations. In the second month AWOL predominates, followed by disciplinary terminations. In fact, students who separated for disciplinary reasons have a steep decline after the first couple of months, an upturn between months 4 and 6 and a very steep decline after that. AWOL status follows a very similar pattern.

As expected, program completion peaks sharply in gross numbers between 6 and 10 months and then remains the predominant reason for separation thereafter. Even though the slope of the graph could make one think that completion is trending down after 10 months, that would be a misinterpretation. In fact, the total number of students remaining beyond this length of stay falls rapidly because many of them are completing. Therefore, for students remaining beyond the 10 month point, completion remains by far the predominant reason for separation.

The graph illustrates clearly that the program loses most non-completers in the first six months through disciplinary infractions, AWOL and resignations.

In an effort to better understand these phenomenon, student separations were divided into three categories. The first category grouped AWOL and disciplinary separations together as "negative" separations. Resignation stands as its own category. The reasons for resignation cannot be determined from the data, but it is known that the student had an orderly separation. The "other" category is predominated by completers followed next by medical separations, and then several miscellaneous categories.

Table 9 looks at how reasons for separation vary among students with different characteristics. It displays data for differing ages, genders, races, and educational achievements. It is critical to note two points before drawing any conclusions from these data. First, none of these descriptions are controlled for other variables as they will be in the logistic regression. Factors that may be associated with one group more than another (e.g. socioeconomic status) could explain the variability. That information is not available here. Second, one must bear in mind that the negative outcomes of AWOL and disciplinary separations result from an interaction that involves both students and staff. Therefore, this table could, on some level, be describing a differential in how staff interacts with students of different ages, genders, races or levels of educational attainment. Again, this information is not available here.

Figure 5. Timing of Separation by Reason for Leaving

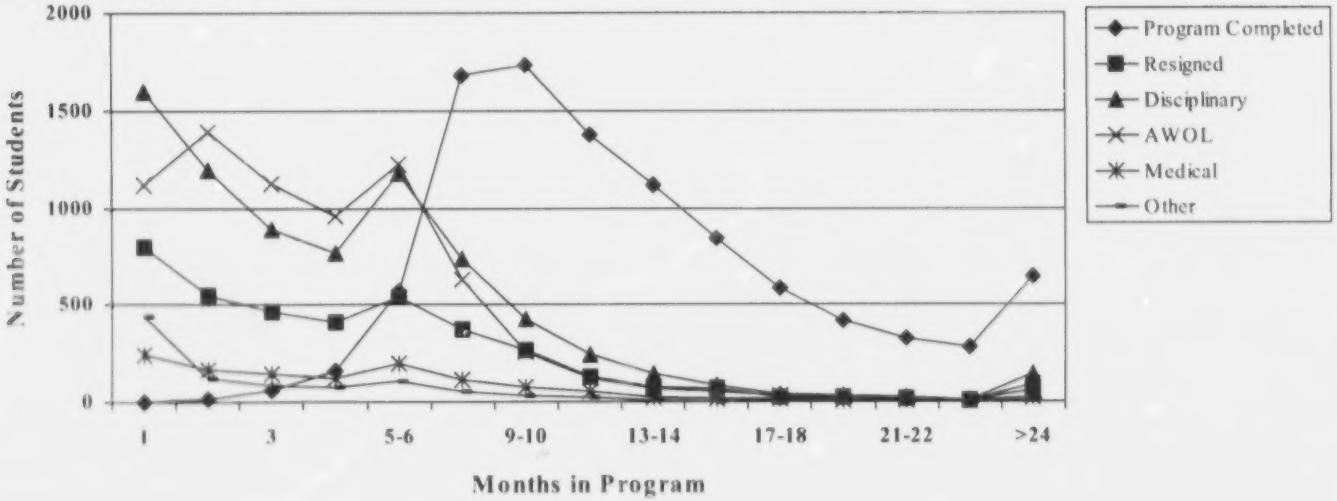

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Table 9 Summary of Demographics and Leaving Reason for Students in the Analysis Sample

	AWOL/ Discipline N (%)	Resign N (%)	Other N (%)	p-value
Sex				**< .0005**
Male	9,483 (52)	2,243 (12)	6,685 (36)	
Female	5,109 (43)	1,554 (13)	5,311 (44)	
Race				**< .0005**
Caucasian	4,341 (47)	1,245 (13)	3,727 (40)	
African American	7,568 (51)	1,701 (12)	5,471 (37)	
Hispanic	1,907 (42)	608 (13)	2,020 (45)	
Native American	556 (51)	162 (15)	381 (35)	
Asian	220 (32)	81 (12)	397 (57)	
Age				**< .0005**
16-17 years	6,861 (55)	1,407 (11)	4,149 (33)	
18-20 years	5,722 (45)	1,703 (13)	5,316 (42)	
21-25 years	2,009 (38)	687 (13)	2,531 (48)	
HS diploma before Job Corps				**< .0005**
No	12,365 (52)	2,955 (12)	8,558 (36)	
Yes	2,227 (34)	842 (13)	3,438 (53)	
GED before Job Corps				**< .0005**
No	12,306 (52)	2,942 (12)	8,476 (36)	
Yes	2,286 (34)	855 (13)	3,520 (53)	

Younger students are more likely to be separated for AWOL/Disciplinary than are older students (55% of 16-17 year olds vs. 38% of 21-25 year olds). Similarly, males are more likely to be separated for these negative reasons than are females (52% vs. 43%). African-American and Native-American students are slightly more likely to be separated for a negative reason than are Caucasians (51% vs. 47%). Hispanic students and Asian/Pacific Islander students were separated for negative reasons 42% and 32% respectively.

Associations Between Explanatory Variables and Outcome Variables

In the process of determining what factors best predict outcomes, a preliminary step is to look at associations between variables and outcomes. This analysis does not control for other variables that may, in fact, explain the relationship. As an example, members of a particular racial group may have quite different distributions in an outcome at a statistically significant level. However, if one were able to control for the effect of socioeconomic status, the difference

between racial groups could disappear. Nevertheless, a first step is to look at what variables appear to be relevant by differences in their distributions associated with an outcome of interest.

Statistical Tests Used to Measure Associations

A chi-squared statistic was used to examine whether there was a significant association between categorical explanatory variables and the outcome variable. Examples of categorical variables include sex, and race. A t-test was used to measure whether there was a significant association between continuous variables, such as age, and the outcome. Some variables were somewhat of a mixture between categorical and continuous. An example of this is hourly wages. Income is generally continuous, but some values had a large number of cases associated with them (e.g. $0). In these mixed cases, the t-test was used, because it is a robust test and most of the distribution was continuous. In cases in which that was no longer feasible, the variable was categorized, and a chi-squared test was used.

Associations between Explanatory Variables and 30- and 90-Day Retention

Tables 10 and 11 show the associations between the explanatory variables and retention. The following associations were statistically significant:

Both 30 and 90-day retention rates were higher for females than for males. Eighty nine percent of women remained in the program beyond 30 days and 71% remained beyond 90 days. In comparison, 86% of men remained at 30 days and 65% remained beyond 90 days.

Age was also found to have statistically significant associations with retention. Older students had higher retention rates. However, the mean difference in age between students who stayed in the program and those who dropped out was only 1-2 months at 30 days and 3-4 months at 90 days.

There were some statistically significant associations between race and retention. Asian/Pacific Islanders were the most likely to be retained. At 30 days, 94% of Asian/ Pacific Islanders were still on center, and 85% remained at 90 days. Eight-nine percent of Hispanics remained on center at 30 days and 73% by 90 days. The other three racial groups had similar proportions of students remaining at 30 days (86-89%) and at 90 days (65-66%).

Several variables related to education were demonstrated to have an association with retention. Students who required a bilingual education were better retained. Students who had a

High School Diploma or GED prior to enrollment in Job Corps had modestly better retention at 30 days (3-4% difference), and substantially better retention at 90 days (9-10% difference). The difference in last grade completed was statistically significant but small. The mean initial TABE score for reading was in the seventh grade range for both retained students and those who dropped out. However, there was an average difference of about a third of a grade-level, with retained students having the average higher test scores. There was a similar association with mean initial TABE math scores, but in math the one third of a grade level difference was between the end of sixth grade for dropouts, and early seventh grade for those retained.

In general, students who came from larger communities tended to be more likely to be retained. Students who attended Job Corps sites in urban or suburban areas had better retention rates than those who attended rural sites. The difference here was relatively small with 4% fewer students being retained at both 30 and 90 days if they attended rural sites.

Some variables related only to students' experience in the program were statistically associated with retention. Non-residents on Job Corps campuses had a higher rate of retention. Some regions had better success rates at retaining students than others. This was more apparent at 90 days than it was at 30 days. At 30 days, retention rates ranged from 84% (Region 03) to 91% (Region 10). By 90 days, Regions 03 and 05 were at retention rates 63% and 62% respectively, while regions 09 and 10 maintained 76% and 74% retention rates, respectively. Other regions had intermediate retention rates. Students whose admission process occurred on a center had substantially better rates of retention.

Students who received a PPEP bonus within 60 days had better retention at 90 days. This association could be related to the nature of this bonus. It is a bonus given to students who have met or exceeded expectations. These certainly are the more successful students and it is therefore not surprising that they would have the better outcome. Alternatively, the confidence-boosting effect of the PPEP bonus may have had an impact on retention.

Several variables were associated with retention, but more weakly than those above. Other variables were associated with 90-day retention but not 30-day retention, or vice versa. Weak associations were observed with variables descriptive of the students' home or neighborhood. These variables included whether the student lived in an unhealthy or unsafe home, lived in a high crime area, or was noted to be culturally deprived. Students who had not lived with relatives were more likely to be retained 90 days. Students who did not receive public

assistance had higher retention rates at 90 days, but there was no difference at 30 days. Some variables were not associated with retention at a statistically significant level. These included marital status, history of employment, whether the student had health insurance, and months out of school.

Overall, it seems that those measured variables that were associated with retention, had a more pronounced effect at 90 days, and a weaker relationship at 30 days. Students who had achieved a higher educational level (by any measure) had higher retention rates. The demographic characteristics of gender, race, and age all had strong associations with retention. Those variables that were descriptive of the students' home environment were not strongly associated with retention. However, an urban environment either at home, or in the center location, was associated with higher retention rates.

Table 10. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and 30-day Retention in Analysis Sample

Variable	30-day		p-value
	Retained N (%)	Dropped out N (%)	
Sex			<.0005
Female	10956 (89)	1395 (11)	
Male	16214 (86)	2709 (14)	
Race			<.0005
Caucasian	8236 (86)	1331 (14)	
African American	13117 (87)	2043 (13)	
Hispanic	4178 (89)	512 (11)	
Native American	952 (85)	171 (15)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	687 (94)	47 (6)	
Marital status			.84
Non-single	249 (86)	40 (14)	
Single	26112 (87)	4049 (13)	
Region			<.0005
01	1309 (86)	210 (14)	
02	2088 (89)	255 (11)	
03	5371 (84)	1028 (16)	
04	4180 (85)	722 (15)	
05	2453 (84)	477 (16)	
06	4206 (88)	578 (12)	
07/ 08	3462 (90)	405 (10)	
09	2401 (90)	256 (10)	
10	1700 (91)	173 (9)	
Size of student's home community			<.0005
< 2,500	3290 (86)	529 (14)	
2,500 – 10,000	2974 (86)	495 (14)	
10,000 – 50,000	5339 (86)	860 (14)	
50,000 – 250,000	5045 (86)	843 (14)	
> 250,000	10522 (88)	1377 (12)	
Site of location			<.0005
Urban	5699 (88)	811 (12)	
Rural	9887 (85)	1690 (15)	
Suburban	10775 (87)	1588 (13)	
Screening agency on site			<.0005
Off site	19927 (86)	3225 (14)	
On site	7192 (89)	875 (11)	
HS diploma before Job Corps			<.0005
No	21030 (86)	3376 (14)	
Yes	6140 (89)	728 (11)	
GED before Job Corps			<.0005
No	20878 (86)	3371 (14)	
Yes	6292 (90)	733 (10)	
Need a bilingual education			<.0005
Spanish/English	574 (92)	51 (8)	
No	26139 (87)	4020 (13)	
Other	457 (93)	33 (7)	
Disruptive home life			.36
No	24221 (87)	3639 (13)	
Yes	2949 (86)	465 (14)	

Table 10. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and 30-day Retention in Analysis Sample (continued)

Variable	30-day		P-value
	Retained N (%)	Dropped out N (%)	
Culturally deprived			.004
No	24394 (87)	3624 (13)	
Yes	2776 (85)	480 (15)	
Living in a high crime area			.001
No	23829 (87)	3523 (13)	
Yes	3341 (85)	581 (15)	
Home unhealthy or unsafe			.026
No	25608 (87)	3832 (13)	
Yes	1562 (85)	272 (15)	
Weeks unemployed			.32
Still employed	9053 (87)	1333 (13)	
Some weeks unemployed	6004 (87)	909 (13)	
Never employed	11318 (87)	1767 (14)	
Student relation to their family			.003
Family head	3011 (87)	431 (13)	
Family member	16711 (86)	2637 (14)	
Unrelated individual	7448 (88)	1036 (12)	
Public assistance			.11
Yes	6050 (87)	940 (13)	
No	16600 (87)	2440 (13)	
Other assistance	4520 (86)	724 (14)	
Student resident on campus of Job Corps			<.0005
No	3690 (91)	346 (9)	
Yes	23480 (86)	3758 (14)	
Student had health insurance			.002
No	21087 (86)	3320 (14)	
Yes	4396 (88)	598 (12)	
Minimum wage before Job Corps			.062
Below min. wage	19137 (87)	2949 (13)	
At or above min. wage	8033 (87)	1155 (13)	
Completed vocational training			<.0005
Advanced completer	3990 (100)	2 (<1)	
Vocational completer	9446 (100)	5 (<1)	
Trainees	13734 (77)	4097 (23)	
Age, years, Mean (SD)	18.9 (2.14)	18.8 (2.10)	<.0005
Months out of school, Mean (SD)	15.4 (18.51)	15.5 (17.64)	.87
Last grade completed, Mean (SD)	10.1 (1.49)	9.9 (1.49)	<.0005
No. of people in student's residence, Mean (SD)	3.1 (2.57)	3.2 (2.29)	.42
No. of dependents, Mean (SD)	0.18 (0.57)	0.15 (0.50)	.0082
Time from interview to enrollment, days, Mean (SD)	54.0 (55.3)	52.9 (49.7)	.16
Initial Reading TABE, Mean (SD)	7.7 (3.33)	7.3 (3.12)	<.0005
Initial Math TABE, Mean (SD)	7.1 (2.70)	6.7 (2.64)	<.0005

Table 11. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and 90-day Retention in Analysis Sample

Variable	90-day		P-value
	Retained N (%)	Dropped out N (%)	
Sex			<.0005
Female	8757 (71)	3594 (29)	
Male	12385 (65)	6538 (35)	
Race			<.0005
Caucasian	6302 (66)	3265 (34)	
African American	10063 (66)	5097 (34)	
Hispanic	3436 (73)	1254 (27)	
Native American	727 (65)	396 (35)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	614 (84)	120 (16)	
Marital status			.21
Non-single	183 (63)	106 (37)	
Single	20155 (67)	10006 (33)	
Region			<.0005
01	1021 (67)	498 (33)	
02	1664 (71)	679 (29)	
03	4025 (63)	2374 (37)	
04	3190 (65)	1712 (35)	
05	1818 (62)	1112 (38)	
06	3258 (68)	1526 (32)	
07/ 08	2762 (71)	1105 (29)	
09	2010 (76)	647 (23)	
10	1394 (74)	479 (26)	
Size of student's home community			<.0005
< 2,500	2590 (68)	1229 (32)	
2,500 – 10,000	2244 (65)	1225 (35)	
10,000 – 50,000	4094 (66)	2105 (34)	
50,000 – 250,000	3909 (66)	1979 (34)	
> 250,000	8305 (70)	3594 (30)	
Site of location			<.0005
Urban	4432 (68)	2078 (32)	
Rural	7463 (64)	4114 (36)	
Suburban	8443 (68)	3920 (32)	
Screening agency on site			<.0005
Off site	15377 (66)	7775 (34)	
On site	5732 (71)	2335 (29)	
HS diploma before Job Corps			<.0005
No	15988 (66)	8418 (34)	
Yes	5154 (75)	1714 (25)	
GED before Job Corps			<.0005
No	15850 (65)	8399 (35)	
Yes	5292 (75)	1733 (25)	
Need a bilingual education			<.0005
Spanish/English	502 (80)	123 (20)	
No	20242 (67)	9917 (33)	
Other	398 (81)	92 (19)	
Disruptive home life			.001
No	18923 (68)	8937 (32)	
Yes	2219 (65)	1195 (35)	

Table 11. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and 90-day Retention in Analysis Sample (continued)

Variable	90-day		P-value
	Retained N (%)	Dropped out N (%)	
Culturally deprived			.001
No	19022 (68)	8996 (32)	
Yes	2120 (65)	1136 (35)	
Living in a high crime area			<.0005
No	18632 (68)	8720 (32)	
Yes	2510 (64)	1412 (36)	
Home unhealthy or unsafe			.005
No	19957 (68)	9483 (32)	
Yes	1185 (65)	649 (35)	
Weeks unemployed			.73
Still employed	7040 (68)	3346 (32)	
Some weeks unemployed	4655 (67)	2258 (33)	
Never employed	8810 (67)	4275 (33)	
Student relation to their family			<.0005
Family head	2299 (67)	1143 (33)	
Family member	12886 (67)	6462 (33)	
Unrelated individual	5957 (70)	2527 (30)	
Public assistance			<.0005
Yes	4567 (65)	2423 (35)	
No	13119 (69)	5921 (31)	
Other assistance	3456 (66)	1788 (34)	
Student resident on campus of Job Corps			<.0005
No	2966 (73)	1070 (23)	
Yes	18176 (67)	9062 (33)	
Student had health insurance			.28
No	16418 (67)	7989 (33)	
Yes	3399 (68)	1595 (32)	
Minimum wage before Job Corps			.023
Below min. wage	14845 (67)	7241 (33)	
At or above min. wage	6297 (69)	2891 (31)	
Received PPEP bonus within 60-day			<.0005
No	17206 (86)	2852 (14)	
Yes	3505 (92)	305 (8)	
Age, years, Mean (SD)	19.0 (2.15)	18.7 (2.08)	<.0005
Months out of school, Mean (SD)	15.5 (18.56)	15.4 (18.04)	.65
Last grade completed, Mean (SD)	10.1 (1.49)	9.8 (1.47)	<.0005
No. of people in student's residence, Mean (SD)	3.1 (2.44)	3.2 (2.72)	.0006
No. of dependents, Mean (SD)	0.17 (0.57)	0.18 (0.56)	.41
Time from interview to enrollment, days, Mean (SD)	54.3 (55.9)	53.0 (51.9)	.04
Initial Reading TABE, Mean (SD)	7.8 (3.37)	7.5 (3.16)	<.0005
Initial Math TABE, Mean (SD)	7.2 (2.71)	6.8 (2.64)	<.0005

Associations between Explanatory Variables and Completion

Tables 12-14 give the associations with completion variables. Table 12 displays the association between the explanatory variables and completion as defined for this analysis – completion of GED and/or vocational training (VOC). Tables 13 and 14 offer the associations for only GED completion and vocational completion respectively.

The associations between completion and demographic variables were somewhat more complex than retention. Females had somewhat higher rates of completion of GED and/or vocational training. Although Asians had the highest vocational training completion rates (58% vs. 45% or less other races), they did not do as well in completing the GED. However, their combined rate (GED and VOC) was still 10% higher than all other races (62% vs. 52% for Caucasians). Native Americans had the lowest overall success rate (44%). African-Americans had the lowest GED completion rates (23%). Overall, within each completion category, there was an 18% rate difference from lowest to highest, with VOC or GED/VOC combined being lowest in Native Americans and highest in Asian/Pacific Islanders and GED lowest in African-Americans and highest in Caucasians. Completers of either GED or VOC were older by approximately six months.

There were differences in completion rates among the regions. The difference in rates of VOC completion between the lowest and highest performing regions was eight percent, and the distribution of rates was uniform. However, rates for GED completion ranged from 45% completion in Region 10 down to 20% in Region 04. Combining these to an overall completion rate of GED and/or VOC, the range is tighter varying from 46% (Region 04) to 55% (Regions 07, 08, and 10).

There were also differences noted in terms of the students' family and environment. Students who stated they did not have immediate family had higher completion rates both for GED and VOC. Students who were described as culturally deprived had lower completion rates, as did those who reported living in high crime areas. The completers tended to have a lower average number of people in their residence, as well as fewer dependents.

In terms of previous economic history, those who were unemployed for some time had higher completion rates than those currently employed. Those currently employed had higher completion rates than those who were never employed. Within those employed, those who earned minimum wage or higher also had higher completion rates. It is possible that these

results are associated with age, since we can assume younger students are less likely to have held a job. Those who received public assistance had lower completion rates than those who received other assistance. Those who did not receive any assistance had higher completion rates than those who received some form of assistance.

In terms of educational attainment, those who entered Job Corps with a high school diploma had substantially higher completion rates of vocational training. Students who completed the program had on average completed approximately a third higher of a grade in school. Those who completed the vocational training had an initial reading TABE score that was higher by approximately half a grade than those who did not. For GED completion, this difference was approximately three grades, reflecting, at least partially, the entry criteria for the GED program. Combining the two, for completion of GED and/or VOC, there was a difference of 1.3 grade levels in the initial TABE reading score. The initial math TABE score showed the same picture, with a half a grade difference between the VOC completers versus non-completers, two grades between the GED completers versus non-completers, and one grade difference between completers of either GED or Vocation versus those program non-completers.

Another finding was that the number of pay days was four times as large among the VOC completers, as compared to the non-completers, twice as large among the GED completers versus non-completers, and 3.5 times as large overall. The average total number of pay days among completers was 9-11 months. The average number of non-pay days was 11, similar in all groups. Thus, the number of pay days variable is essentially a proxy for duration of stay. Once the number of non-pay days is too high, the student is no longer a participant in the program. This association therefore shows that the number of paydays is another way to measure outcome, rather than explain the outcome. The number of non-pay days lacked variability. While at Job Corps, there was an approximately 20% higher completion rate among those receiving the PPEP bonus than among those who did not.

Among the GED completers there was a much higher rate of VOC completers than among the GED non-completers. Contrary to the retention data, students in urban sites did worse, and students from smaller towns did better, as well as students who were Job Corps residents. Variables that were not associated with completion were the time from interview to enrollment, whether the student was residential or nonresidential, and whether their home was labeled unhealthy or unsafe.

Table 12. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and Completion in Analysis Sample

Variable	Completion		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Sex			.004
Female	6165 (50)	6186 (50)	
Male	9764 (52)	9195 (48)	
Race			<.0005
Caucasian	4544 (48)	5023 (52)	
African American	8173 (54)	6987 (46)	
Hispanic	2307 (49)	2383 (51)	
Native American	626 (56)	497 (44)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	279 (38)	455 (62)	
Marital status			.5
Non-single	154 (53)	135 (47)	
Single	15469 (51)	14692 (49)	
Region			<.0005
01	797 (52)	722 (48)	
02	1193 (51)	1150 (49)	
03	3343 (52)	3056 (48)	
04	2636 (54)	2266 (46)	
05	1564 (53)	1366 (47)	
06	2537 (53)	2247 (47)	
07/ 08	1758 (45)	2109 (55)	
09	1265 (48)	1392 (52)	
10	836 (45)	1037 (55)	
Size of student's home community			.04
< 2,500	1875 (49)	1944 (51)	
2,500 – 10,000	1813 (52)	1656 (48)	
10,000 – 50,000	3119 (50)	3080 (50)	
50,000 – 250,000	2994 (51)	2894 (49)	
> 250,000	6128 (52)	5771 (48)	
Site of location			.007
Urban	3424 (53)	3086 (47)	
Rural	5981 (52)	5596 (48)	
Suburban	6218 (50)	6145 (50)	
Screening agency on site			.42
Off site	11758 (51)	11394 (49)	
On site	4139 (51)	3928 (49)	
HS diploma before Job Corps			<.0005
No	12908 (53)	11498 (47)	
Yes	3021 (44)	3847 (56)	
Need a bilingual education			<.0005
Spanish/English	276 (44)	349 (56)	
No	15454 (51)	14705 (49)	
Other	199 (41)	291 (59)	
Disruptive home life			.02
No	14124 (51)	13736 (49)	
Yes	1805 (51)	1609 (47)	

Table 12. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and Completion in Analysis Sample (continued)

Variable	Completion		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Culturally deprived			<.0005
No	14169 (51)	13849 (49)	
Yes	1760 (54)	1496 (46)	
Living in a high crime area			<.0005
No	13778 (50)	13574 (50)	
Yes	2151 (55)	1771 (45)	
Home unhealthy or unsafe			.09
No	14960 (51)	14480 (49)	
Yes	969 (53)	865 (47)	
Weeks unemployed			<.0005
Still employed	5244 (50)	5142 (50)	
Some weeks unemployed	3240 (47)	3673 (53)	
Never employed	6951 (53)	6134 (47)	
Student relation to their family			<.0005
Family head	1751 (51)	1691 (49)	
Family member	10300 (53)	9048 (47)	
Unrelated individual	3878 (46)	4606 (54)	
Public assistance			<.0005
Yes	3976 (57)	3014 (43)	
No	9129 (48)	9911 (52)	
Other assistance	2824 (54)	2420 (46)	
Student resident on campus of Job Corps			.38
No	2082 (52)	1954 (48)	
Yes	13847 (51)	13391 (49)	
Student had health insurance			.03
No	12268 (50)	12139 (50)	
Yes	2596 (52)	2398 (48)	
Minimum wage before Job Corps			<.0005
Below min. wage	11642 (53)	10444 (47)	
At or above min. wage	4287 (47)	4901 (53)	
Received PPEP bonus within 60-day			<.0005
No	7970 (40)	12088 (60)	
Yes	851 (22)	2959 (78)	
Age, years, Mean (SD)	18.7 (2.08)	19.1 (2.17)	<.0005
Months out of school, Mean (SD)	14.9 (17.72)	16.0 (19.05)	<.0005
Last grade completed, Mean (SD)	9.9 (1.50)	10.22 (1.45)	<.0005
No. of people in student's residence, Mean (SD)	3.3 (2.60)	3.0 (2.5)	<.0005
No. of dependents, Mean (SD)	0.2 (0.58)	0.16 (0.55)	<.0005
Time from interview to enrollment, days, Mean (SD)	53.2 (53.43)	54.6 (55.81)	.03
Initial Reading TABE, Mean (SD)	7.0 (3.10)	8.3 (3.39)	<.0005
Initial Math TABE, Mean (SD)	6.5 (2.50)	7.6 (2.78)	<.0005
Total pay days, Mean (SD)	81.2 (90.63)	298.3 (177.94)	<.0005
Total non-pay days, Mean (SD)	11.0 (13.76)	11.4 (15.50)	.02

Table 13. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and GED in Analysis Sample

Variable	GED		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Sex			<.0005
Female	6221 (69)	2797 (31)	
Male	10857 (71)	4374 (29)	
Race			<.0005
Caucasian	4190 (60)	2784 (40)	
African American	9350 (77)	2808 (23)	
Hispanic	2602 (69)	1190 (31)	
Native American	564 (73)	210 (27)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	342 (66)	179 (34)	
Marital status			.009
Non-single	119 (63)	71 (38)	
Single	16805 (71)	6763 (29)	
Region			<.0005
01	750 (69)	338 (31)	
02	1397 (70)	603 (30)	
03	3603 (72)	1402 (28)	
04	3154 (80)	798 (20)	
05	1677 (71)	682 (29)	
06	2693 (73)	983 (27)	
07/ 08	1803 (62)	1114 (38)	
09	1273 (66)	651 (34)	
10	728 (55)	600 (45)	
Size of student's home community			<.0005
< 2,500	1902 (67)	934 (33)	
2,500 – 10,000	1882 (72)	725 (28)	
10,000 – 50,000	3294 (70)	1439 (30)	
50,000 – 250,000	3228 (70)	1362 (30)	
> 250,000	6772 (71)	2711 (29)	
Site of location			<.0005
Urban	3694 (74)	1281 (26)	
Rural	6655 (71)	2732 (29)	
Suburban	6575 (70)	2821 (30)	
Screening agency on site			.001
On site	12468 (70)	5390 (30)	
Off site	4574 (72)	1770 (28)	
HS diploma before Job Corps			<.0005
No	17005 (71)	7113 (29)	
Yes	73 (56)	58 (44)	
Need a bilingual education			.001
Spanish/English	328 (63)	191 (37)	
No	16480 (71)	6880 (29)	
Other	270 (73)	100 (27)	
Disruptive home life			.5
No	15044 (70)	6340 (30)	
Yes	2034 (71)	831 (29)	

Table 13. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and GED in Analysis Sample (continued)

Variable	GED		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Culturally deprived			<.0005
No	15082 (70)	6499 (30)	
Yes	1996 (74)	705 (26)	
Living in a high crime area			<.0005
No	14602 (70)	6306 (30)	
Yes	2476 (74)	865 (26)	
Home unhealthy or unsafe			.006
No	15971 (70)	6773 (30)	
Yes	1107 (74)	398 (26)	
Weeks unemployed			<.0005
Still employed	5724 (71)	2334 (29)	
Some weeks unemployed	2933 (63)	1747 (37)	
Never employed	7942 (73)	2915 (27)	
Student relation to their family			<.0005
Family head	1533 (70)	659 (30)	
Family member	12126 (73)	4438 (27)	
Unrelated individual	3419 (62)	2074 (38)	
Public assistance			<.0005
Yes	4518 (77)	1317 (23)	
No	9358 (66)	4750 (34)	
Other assistance	3202 (74)	1104 (26)	
Student resident on campus of Job Corps			<.0005
No	2081 (73)	755 (27)	
Yes	14997 (70)	6416 (30)	
Student had health insurance			.12
No	13032 (70)	5594 (30)	
Yes	2967 (71)	1201 (29)	
Minimum wage before Job Corps			<.0005
Below min. wage	13272 (73)	4926 (27)	
At or above min. wage	3806 (63)	2245 (37)	
Student highest level achieved in vocation			<.0005
Advanced completer	921 (36)	1655 (64)	
Vocational completer	3311 (48)	3614 (52)	
None	12846 (87)	1902 (13)	
Received PPEP bonus within 60-day			<.0005
No	10166 (64)	5658 (36)	
Yes	1035 (45)	1269 (55)	
Age, years, Mean (SD)	18.3 (1.90)	18.7 (2.00)	<.0005
Months out of school, Mean (SD)	13.3 (17.26)	14.4 (18.52)	<.0005
Last grade completed, Mean (SD)	9.4 (1.22)	9.8 (1.10)	<.0005
No. of people in student's residence, Mean (SD)	3.5 (2.53)	3.1 (2.52)	<.0005
No. of dependents, Mean (SD)	0.17 (0.57)	0.14 (0.51)	<.0005
No. days interview to enrollment, Mean (SD)	53.9 (53.9)	54.4 (54.20)	.05
Initial Reading TABE, Mean (SD)	6.4 (2.83)	9.4 (3.00)	<.0005
Initial Math TABE, Mean (SD)	6.1 (2.20)	8.3 (2.53)	<.0005
Total pay days, Mean (SD)	134.7 (146.2)	276.4 (176.8)	<.0005
Total non-pay days, Mean (SD)	11.7 (15.0)	10.9 (14.7)	<.0005

Table 14. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and VOC in Analysis Sample

Variable	VOC		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Sex			<.0005
Female	6856 (56)	5495 (45)	
Male	10975 (58)	7948 (42)	
Race			<.0005
Caucasian	5359 (56)	4208 (44)	
African American	8921 (59)	6239 (41)	
Hispanic	2563 (55)	2127 (45)	
Native American	682 (61)	441 (39)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	306 (42)	428 (58)	
Marital status			.25
Non-single	174 (60)	115 (40)	
Single	17153 (57)	13008 (43)	
Region			<.0005
01	879 (56)	640 (42)	
02	1339 (57)	1004 (43)	
03	3799 (59)	2600 (41)	
04	2878 (59)	2024 (41)	
05	1747 (60)	1183 (40)	
06	2762 (58)	2022 (42)	
07/ 08	1996 (52)	1871 (48)	
09	1417 (53)	1240 (47)	
10	1014 (54)	859 (46)	
Size of student's home community			.09
< 2,500	2116 (55)	1703 (46)	
2,500 – 10,000	2030 (59)	1439 (41)	
10,000 – 50,000	3513 (57)	2686 (43)	
50,000 – 250,000	3353 (57)	2535 (43)	
> 250,000	6819 (57)	5080 (43)	
Site of location			.005
Urban	3753 (58)	2757 (42)	
Rural	6676 (58)	4901 (42)	
Suburban	6898 (56)	5465 (44)	
Screening agency on site			1.0
On site	13196 (57)	9956 (43)	
Off site	4599 (57)	3468 (43)	
HS diploma before Job Corps			<.0005
No	14794 (61)	9612 (39)	
Yes	3037 (44)	3831 (56)	
GED not obtained at Job Corps			<.0005
No	14748 (61)	9501 (39)	
Yes	3038 (44)	3942 (56)	
Need a bilingual education			<.0005
Spanish/English	307 (49)	318 (51)	
No	17312 (57)	12847 (43)	
Other	212 (43)	278 (57)	
Disruptive home life			.002
No	15798 (57)	12062 (43)	
Yes	2033 (60)	1381 (41)	

Table 14. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables and VOC in Analysis Sample (continued)

Variable	VOC		P-value
	No N (%)	Yes N (%)	
Culturally deprived			<.0005
No	15865 (57)	12153 (43)	
Yes	1966 (60)	1290 (40)	
Living in a high crime area			<.0005
No	15440 (57)	11912 (43)	
Yes	2391 (61)	1531 (39)	
Home unhealthy or unsafe			.3
No	16763 (57)	12677 (43)	
Yes	1068 (58)	766 (42)	
Weeks unemployed			<.0005
Still employed	5854 (56)	4532 (44)	
Some weeks unemployed	3743 (54)	3170 (46)	
Never employed	7675 (59)	5410 (41)	
Student relation to their family			<.0005
Family head	1945 (57)	1497 (43)	
Family member	11451 (59)	7897 (41)	
Unrelated individual	4435 (52)	4049 (48)	
Public assistance			<.0005
Yes	4340 (62)	2650 (38)	
No	10381 (55)	8659 (45)	
Other assistance	3110 (59)	2134 (41)	
Student resident on campus of Job Corps			.5
No	2280 (57)	1756 (43)	
Yes	15551 (57)	11687 (43)	
Student had health insurance			.06
No	13754 (56)	10653 (44)	
Yes	2885 (58)	2109 (42)	
Minimum wage before Job Corps			<.0005
Below min. wage	12901 (58)	9185 (42)	
At or above min. wage	4930 (54)	4258 (46)	
Received PPEP bonus within 60-day			<.0005
No	9403 (47)	10655 (53)	
Yes	1115 (29)	2695 (71)	
Age, years, Mean (SD)	18.7 (2.05)	19.2 (2.20)	<.0005
Months out of school, Mean (SD)	14.8 (17.78)	16.3 (19.14)	<.0005
Last grade completed, Mean (SD)	9.9 (1.47)	10.3 (1.48)	<.0005
No. of people in student's residence, Mean (SD)	3.2 (2.60)	3.0 (2.45)	<.0005
No. of dependents, Mean (SD)	0.18 (0.57)	0.16 (0.56)	<.0005
No. days interview to enrollment, Mean (SD)	53.3 (53.4)	54.7 (56.14)	.02
Initial Reading TABE, Mean (SD)	7.4 (3.21)	8.0 (3.41)	<.0005
Initial Math TABE, Mean (SD)	6.8 (2.60)	7.4 (2.77)	<.0005
Total pay days, Mean (SD)	85.9 (91.62)	320.3 (174.72)	<.0005
Total non-pay days, Mean (SD)	11.0 (13.74)	11.4 (15.74)	.03

Table 15 gives a summary of all the associations. It should be noted that all the associations were considered separately. Clearly, many of these variables are associated with each other, and the relationships described are not independent. Younger participants, for example, may be earning lower wages, may have completed lower grades, may have a shorter interval since leaving school, and may have, on average, somewhat lower initial TABE scores. Rather than explore all possible relationships between these explanatory variables, a more efficient approach is to model the data. In modeling the data, we explore the predictive power of these variables jointly, and in the presence of each other. In this way, we obtain an estimate for the combined ability of the variables measured to explain the outcomes of retention and completion.

Table 15. Summary of Associations between Background, Job Corps Experience Variables, and Outcomes

Variable	30 days	90 days	Completion	GED at JC	VOC
	n=31,274	n=31,274	n=31,274	n=24,249	n=31,274
Sex	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
Race	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Age	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Marital status	-	-	-	-	-
Region	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Size of student's home community	+++	+++	+	+++	-
Location of site	+++	+++	++	+++	++
GED before JC	+++	+++	n/a	n/a	+++
Bilingual education	+++	+++	+++	++	+++
Disruptive home life	-	++	+	-	++
Culturally deprived	++	++	+++	+++	+++
Weeks unemployed	-	-	+++	+++	+++
Months out of school	-	-	+++	+++	+++
Last grade completed	+++	++	+++	+++	+++
No. of dependents	+	-	+++	+++	+++
Public assistance	-	+++	+++	+++	+++
Screening agency on site	+++	+++	-	++	-
Completed Vocational training	n/a	n/a	n/a	+++	n/a
Received PPEP bonus within 60 days	n/a	+++	+++	+++	++
Time from interview to enrollment	-	+	+	-	+
Total pay days	n/a	n/a	+++	+++	+++
Total non-pay days	n/a	n/a	+	+++	+
Initial Reading TABE	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Initial Math TABE	++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Living in high crime area	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Home distance from JC	-	-	+++	+++	+++
Minimum wage before JC	-	-	+++	+++	+++
Home unhealthy or unsafe	+	++	-	+	-
No. people in student's residence	-	++	+++	+++	+++

+++ = $p < .0005$
++ = $p < .005$
+ = $p < .05$
- = $p > .05$
n/a not applicable

Modeling Retention

Logistic regression was used as the modeling approach for both retention and completion. Tables 16 and 17 show the best models obtained for the 30-day and 90-day retention outcomes. The coefficients are expressed as odds ratios. For example, in Table 16, the odds ratio for sex is 0.75 male vs. female. An odds ratio of 1.0 reflects that both groups have equal likelihood of being retained. The odds ratio of 0.75 means that the male student is 25% less likely to be retained after 30 days than the female student, provided that all their other characteristics included in the model are identical to both men and women (i.e., same region, same race, same age, etc.). In other words, if the female student has 80% probability of being retained at 90 days, then a male student has .75 x 80%=60% probability of being retained at 90 days, all else being equal.

The odds ratio is interpreted a little differently for continuous explanatory variables, such as age. Age has an odds ratio of 1.06 in Table 16. Since age is measured in years in this data set, it means that for every increase in age by one year, a student is six percent more likely to be retained than another student, provided all other variables are held the same for both. For example, if an 18 year-old female student has an estimated retention rate of 70%, a 19 year-old female student will have an estimated retention rate of 1.06 x 70% = 74%. A 20 year-old female will have an estimated rate of 1.06 x .74% = 79%.

Another point to note when examining these models is that not all coefficients (odds ratios) are statistically significant. In this case, the calculated numeric value is different from 1.0, but it is not statistically different at a predefined significance level ($p<0.05$). Therefore, we do not have confidence to infer that it is substantially different than 1.0. To aid the reader and to also call attention to this issue, all the odds ratios that are not significant are noted in parentheses within the tables describing the logistic regression models. We include in the presentation all those variables that do not have significant odds ratios since if variables with non-significant odds ratios were removed from the model, different results would be obtained and the coefficients for the significant variables would be different.

The best model for 30-day retention shows that females are better retained. In terms of racial groups, Asians have better retention, followed by Hispanics, and Native Americans have the worst. African-Americans and Caucasians are comparable. Retention increases by six percent of the retention rate for every year of older age, when all other predictors are the same.

The regions fall into three groups based on the logistic regression. The lowest retention is in Regions 03 and 05. The middle group includes regions 01, 04, and 06 and the top group includes regions 02, 07/ 08, 09, and 10. Whether the student received public assistance, the number of people in the students' residence, or the size of the students' home community did not matter. Those who are out of school for a shorter time were slightly less likely to drop out. Those who needed any bilingual education had substantially better retention at 30 days, and this is consistent with Table 10. Also consistently , those who had GED before Job Corps were 16% more likely to stay beyond 30 days, and for each grade higher on the initial TABE (math or reading), there was a three or four percent higher probability of being retained. The model estimates that a student is seven percent more likely to stay beyond 30 days than a student of the same sex, age, race, region, etc. who scored one lower TABE grade level on both reading and math tests. Urban sites had substantially higher retention rates at 30 days. Finally, having the screening agency on site increased 30-day retention by 25%, above and beyond other variables.

Table 16. Logistic Regression Model for 30-day Retention

	Odds Ratio	p-value	Direction
Sex	.75	.0001	Male vs. Female
Race	(1.08)	.15	(African-American vs. Caucasian)
	1.17	.03	Hispanic vs. Caucasian
	.63	.0001	Native American vs. Caucasian
	1.97	.005	Asian vs. Caucasian
Age in years	1.06	.0001	Older stay more
Region	1.27	.04	Region 2 vs. Region 1
	.78	.01	Region 3 vs. Region 1
	(.95)	.62	(Region 4 vs. Region 1)
	.75	.009	Region 5 vs. Region 1
	(1.20)	.08	(Region 6 vs. Region 1)
	1.36	.004	Region 7 vs. Region 1
	1.32	.02	Region 9 vs. Region 1
	1.70	.0001	Region 10 vs. Region 1
No. people in student's residence	(1.02)	.08	(More stay more)
Public assistance	(1.07)	.17	(No vs. Yes)
	(.95)	.38	(Other assistance vs. Yes)
Months out of school	.99	.0001	Shorter duration stay more
Need a bilingual program	.61	.005	No vs. Spanish/English
	(1.10)	.74	(Other vs. Spanish/English)
GED before Job Corps	1.16	.01	Yes vs. No
Initial Math TABE	1.04	.0003	Higher result stay more
Initial Reading TABE	1.03	.0005	High result stay more
Size of student's home community	(.95)	.50	(2,500-10,000 vs. < 2,500)
	(.94)	.34	(10,000-50,000 vs. < 2,500)
	(.88)	.07	(50,000-250,000 vs. < 2,500)
	(1.06)	.42	(250,000 and over vs. < 2,500)
Location of site	.84	.002	Rural vs. Urban
	.77	.0001	Suburban vs. Urban
Screening agency on site	1.25	.0001	On site vs. Off site

Note: Parentheses indicate nonsignificant odds ratios.

Results for 90-day retention were a bit different. Females were still retained more than males. Asians had the highest retention, more than double the Caucasians, and the Native Americans were still the poorest retained. However, contrary to retention at 30 days, both African-Americans and Hispanics were better retained than Caucasians, whereas at 30 days, there were no significant differences among African-Americans and Caucasians. The relation of age to retention is consistent with the 30 day finding, an estimated eight percent higher retention rate for each year older. Students who were not single had substantially lower retention rates after adjusting for all other variables. While the odds ratios are slightly different than for 30 days, the regional groupings are identical at 90 days to those for 30 days. Most variables that

described the student's home did not have an effect on 30-day retention, but more of these variables affected 90-day retention. Students who were not on public assistance had higher retention rates. As with 30 days, students who had a GED before Job Corps had substantially higher retention rates, and this effect was even more pronounced (33% higher rates). Also, consistent with the model for 30 day retention, those needing bilingual education had substantially higher retention rates, and shorter time out of school and higher initial reading TABE scores resulted in slightly higher retention as well. The initial math TABE, which had an effect on the 30 day retention, was not predictive of the 90 day retention, after controlling for stronger predictors. Students who lived in a high crime area, had lower retention rates. Note again that this is while controlling for variables such as race, age, size of city, etc. For 90 days, it appears that those who came either from the smallest places (< 2,500), or the largest (> 250,000) had higher retention rates than all others. This is consistent with Table 11, and does not appear to be a spurious result. As in the 30 days, the urban sites had better retention rates than rural or suburban sites. Whether the screening agency was on site was still influential at 90 days, but less so (15% vs. 25% at 30 days). Overall, the results for the 90-day model are more robust than for the 30-day model.

Table 17. Logistic Regression Model for 90-day Retention

	Odds Ratio	p-value	Direction
Sex	.79	.0001	Male vs. Female
Race	1.14	.0001	African-American vs. Caucasian
	1.43	.0001	Hispanic vs. Caucasian
	.79	.001	Native American vs. Caucasian
	2.30	.0001	Asian vs. Caucasian
Age in years	1.08	.0001	Younger drop out more
Marital status	1.38	.01	Single vs. Others
Region	1.17	.05	Region 2 vs. Region 1
	.83	.006	Region 3 vs. Region 1
	(.95)	.49	(Region 4 vs. Region 1)
	.77	.0007	Region 5 vs. Region 1
	(1.01)	.90	(Region 6 vs. Region 1)
	1.26	.001	Region 7 vs. Region 1
	1.19	.03	Region 9 vs. Region 1
	1.49	.0001	Region 10 vs. Region 1
Public assistance	1.18	.0001	No vs. Yes
	(1.04)	.35	(Other assistance vs. Yes)
Minimum wage before Job Corps	.94	.04	At or above min. vs. below min.
Months out of school	.99	.0001	Longer drop out more
Need a bilingual program	.58	.0001	No vs. Spanish/English
	(.99)	.96	(Other vs. Spanish/English)
GED before Job Corps	1.33	.0001	Yes vs. No
Initial Reading TABE	1.04	.0001	Lower result drop out more
Disruptive home life	(.95)	.23	(Yes vs. No)
Living in high crime	.86	.0002	Yes vs. No
Size of student's home community	.86	.004	2,500-10,000 vs. < 2,500
	.88	.007	10,000-50,000 vs. < 2,500
	.89	.002	50,000-250,000 vs. < 2,500
	(.99)	.85	(250,000 and over vs. < 2,500)
Location of site	.91	.01	Rural vs. Urban
	.88	.001	Suburban vs. Urban
Screening agency on site	1.15	.0001	On site vs. off site

Note: Parentheses indicate nonsignificant odds ratios

Modeling Completion

The outcome variable in the logistic regression model described in Table 18 is successful completion of the Job Corps program by completing either GED or vocational training (VOC). Table 7 showed that 49% of the students were completers. Table 18 shows that females were about 10% more likely to complete than males when all other variables were controlled. Asians had the highest completion rates, followed by Hispanics. African-Americans had comparable completion rates to Caucasians, both in the mid-range, while Native Americans had the lowest rates. As in the 90 day retention, those who were not single were less likely to be completers.

For each year of being older, there was a 12% higher probability of being a completer. Regions 07/ 08 and 10, which had the highest retention rates, also had the highest rates of completion. All other regions had comparable rates of completion, when adjusting for all other variables. As in retention, need for public assistance predicted a lower rate of completion, while needing bilingual education predicted being twice as likely to complete the program. The initial reading and math TABE scores predicted eight and nine percent higher probability of completion for each full grade higher TABE score. Note, however, that if a TABE score is too low, a student may not be eligible to participate in the GED program. The model does not directly adjust for that, so that some of the nine percent difference is attributable to not being able to participate. However, it is not likely that ineligibility on the basis of TABE is a large factor, since the distribution of TABE scores is wide both among the eligible and the ineligible to participate. As in the retention model, a student more recently enrolled in school was slightly more likely to complete the program. Having dependents was associated with lower completion rates. Coming from a disruptive home environment was also associated with lower completion rates. The size of the student's home community was not a clear indicator. Finally, location of the screening agency on site was not related to completion. Overall, the completion model was more robust than either of the retention models.

Table 18. Logistic Regression Model for Completion (GED/VOC)

	Odds Ratio	p-value	Direction
Sex	.90	.0001	Male vs. Female
Race	(1.06)	.08	(African-American vs. Caucasian)
	1.30	.0001	Hispanic vs. Caucasian
	.73	.0001	Native American vs. Caucasian
	1.78	.0001	Asian vs. Caucasian
Age in years	1.12	.0001	Older complete more
Marital status	1.38	.01	Single vs. Others
Region	1.25	.002	Region 2 vs. Region 1
	(1.07)	.29	(Region 3 vs. Region 1)
	(1.10)	.13	(Region 4 vs. Region 1)
	(1.04)	.60	(Region 5 vs. Region 1)
	(1.04)	.52	(Region 6 vs. Region 1)
	1.34	.0001	Region 7 vs. Region 1
	(1.13)	.08	(Region 9 vs. Region 1)
	1.35	.0004	Region 10 vs. Region 1
Public assistance	1.20	.0001	No vs. Yes
	(1.07)	.07	(Other assistance vs. Yes)
Need a bilingual program	.54	.0001	No vs. Spanish/English
	(.97)	.84	(Other vs. Spanish/English)
Initial Math TABE	1.08	.0001	Higher result complete more
Initial Reading TABE	1.09	.0001	Higher result complete more
Months out of school	.99	.0001	Shorter complete more
No. of dependents	.87	.0001	Fewer complete more
Disruptive home life	.90	.007	Yes vs. No
Size of student's home community	1.25	.003	2,500-10,000 vs. < 2,500
	.89	.02	10,000-50,000 vs. < 2,500
	(.94)	.15	(50,000-250,000 vs. < 2,500)
	(.92)	.08	(250,000 and over vs. < 2,500)
Location of site	(1.01)	.98	(Rural vs. Urban)
	(.97)	.39	(Suburban vs. Urban)
Screening agency on site	(1.04)	.22	(On site vs. Off site)

Note: Parentheses indicate nonsignificant odds ratios.

Validation Sample

A second sample of the same size was randomly selected from the population database to allow us to examine the robustness of the results obtained in the logistic regression. As was shown in Table 7, the sampling mechanism worked well; the sample had similar characteristics to the analysis sample and was representative of the population. In order to examine the robustness, we fit the final logistic models presented in Tables 16-18 to the validation data set. In general, the models obtained in the original sample performed well in the validation samples. The only substantive difference was that the Caucasians in the validation sample did less well than in the original sample. African-Americans had higher rates than Caucasians in the validation sample. Native Americans still had the lowest success rates in the validation sample, but here their outcomes were not different at a statistically significant level than those of the Caucasians.

Relationship between Proportion of Same-Group Representation and Outcomes

An analysis was performed to consider how same-gender or same-race representation in a center might influence outcomes for an individual. Given the complex dynamics associated with gender, we wanted to explore if there was an association between gender representation and outcome. Similarly, because the sense of connection a student feels with people from the same cultural background may affect his/her acclimation to center, we wanted to explore whether there was an association between the proportion of students in a center who shared the student's racial background and that student's outcomes. It would have been interesting to consider how staff demographics might affect student retention; but, these data are not available for analysis.

A first step in this analysis was to estimate the gender and racial distribution in a center at the time of an individual's enrollment. Every center's demographic balance was calculated, using the total population of students (N= 343,097). For each center, the racial and gender balance was calculated for each calendar year. Though there were likely some demographic balance shifts throughout the year, this created a close estimate of the center demographics a student experienced at enrollment. Then, a data set was created that grouped students into those

who enrolled in centers with 0-10% same-gender or same-race representation on their date of enrollment, 10-20% same-gender or same-race representation, 20-30%, etc.

Figures 6-18 show for each race and each gender the difference in student outcomes associated with varying proportions of representation. Each bar represents students who are enrolled in centers with a particular proportion of same-gender or same-race representation. For example, one bar represents students attending centers with 0-10% same-demographic representation, and the next bar represents those students on centers with 10-20% same-demographic representation, etc. In cases where there are no centers with that proportion of representation, the space is left blank (e.g., in Figure 6, there are no students who arrived at centers with 80-90% female representation). Because this display is designed to isolate the issue of same-demographic representation and to easily illustrate trends, the bars represent the percentages of students within each cohort (not the total number) who experienced the outcome described on the y-axis. The reader should bear in mind that there are different numbers of students who attended centers with these different levels of representation, as shown in Table 19 (e.g., 37.2% of females attended centers with 40-50% female representation, but only 2.4% attended centers with 10-20% representation). The horizontal line shows the percentage of students expected to have the outcome on each figure. The expected outcome is calculated based on a null hypothesis that representation and outcome are not related. It is therefore the average rate at which the demographic group experienced the outcome. The influence of same race or gender representation on center is demonstrated by the difference between the expected outcome and the observed outcome illustrated by the bar height. To accentuate the trends, the y-axis varies between figures (note that in figures 6-9 and 13-15, the range is from 0-50%, in figures 10-12 the range is 0-25%, and in figures 16-18 it is 0-80%).

Figures 6-9 describe the relationship between same-gender representation and outcomes. Females left centers by 30 and 90 days at higher than expected rates if the centers did not have at least 40% female representation. Once a center achieved a 40% female census, the pattern reversed and females were more likely to remain on center. Males have a very different pattern than females. In fact, they were more likely to be retained at 30 and 90 days when they attended centers with fewer than 60% men. Once a center passed the 60% male census point, men were more likely to leave. For both males and females, there is no clear pattern for same-gender representation and the outcome of program completion.

Figures 10-18 illustrate the influence of same-race representation on the outcomes of 30-day retention, 90-day retention and completion of GED and/or vocation. Caucasian students were more likely to leave and less likely to complete when they enrolled on centers with less than 40-50% Caucasian representation. There were two notable patterns among African-American students. First, there seems to be a trend that African-American students in centers with less than 20% African-American representation had better than expected outcomes. Second, African-Americans who attended centers that had 90-100% African-American representation remained on center at 30 days at rates substantially more than expected and were also more likely to be retained at 90 days. There was no dramatic difference in whether African-American students at these centers completed. Hispanic students were more likely to leave before 30 and 90 days if they were enrolled in centers with less than 20% Hispanic representation. They were substantially less likely to leave before 30 or 90 days if they enrolled in centers with 90-100% Hispanic representation. The pattern of completion for Hispanic students was not as clear, though they seemed more likely to complete on the centers with predominant Hispanic representation. There were no clear patterns for Asian/Pacific Islanders or Native Americans.

When considering any of these trends, the reader should remain aware that students attending centers with extremes in representation (i.e., all male or female centers, or nearly all Hispanic centers) have likely enrolled in one of a few specialized centers. Therefore, their success may be related to the strong connection they feel to similar peers or to something unique about the center.

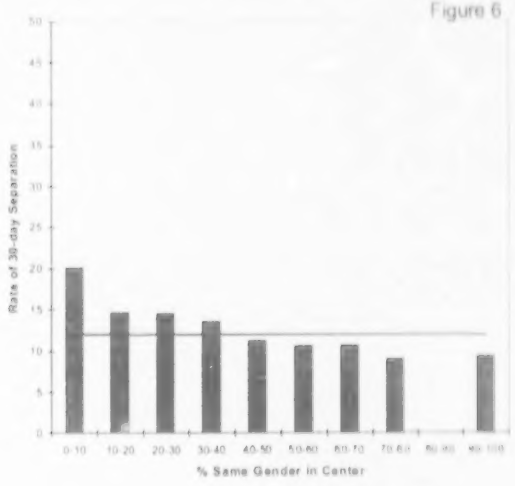
Table 19. Percentage of Students Enrolled in Centers with Varying Proportions of Same Group Representation

	Male	Female	African American	Caucasian	Hispanic
0-10 %	0.2	0.1	0.7	3.5	16.1
10-20 %	0.0	2.4	3.0	13.4	12.9
20-30 %	0.5	11.7	5.6	19.2	12.5
30-40 %	2.0	18.1	4.8	13.3	12.3
40-50 %	10.5	37.2	4.3	11.3	20.1
50-60 %	29.4	18.2	8.9	8.8	9.3
60-70 %	22.1	5.3	19.3	11.3	0.2
70-80 %	24.0	1.9	26.7	12.6	0.0
80-90 %	7.4	0.0	20.5	6.4	0.0
90-100 %	4.0	5.2	6.2	0.3	16.7

Relationship between 30-day Separation and Same-Gender Representation

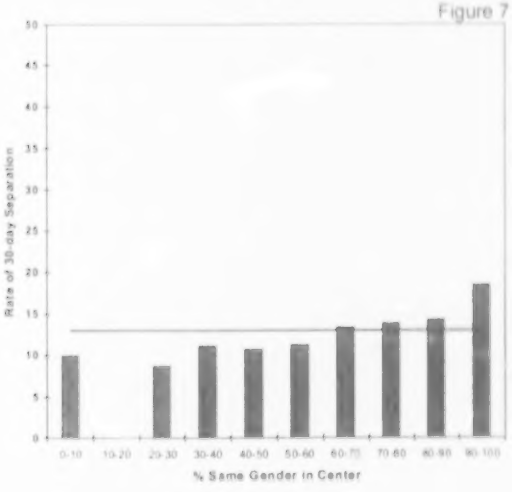
FEMALES

Figure 6



MALES

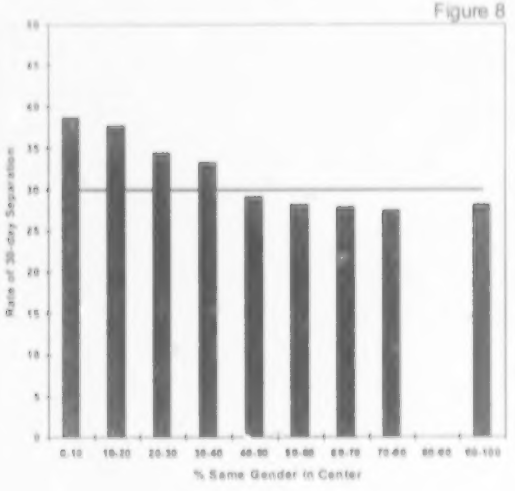
Figure 7



Relationship between 90-day Separation and Same-Gender Representation

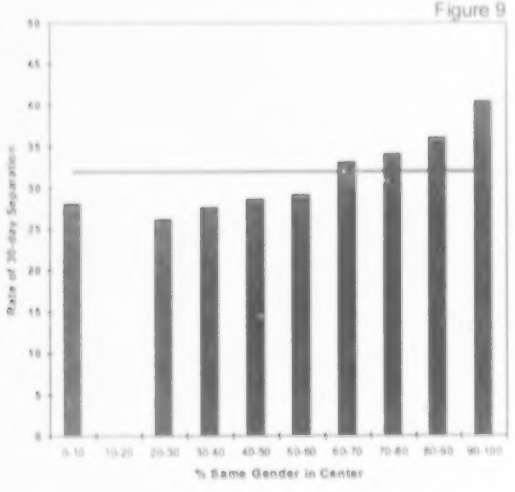
FEMALES

Figure 8



MALES

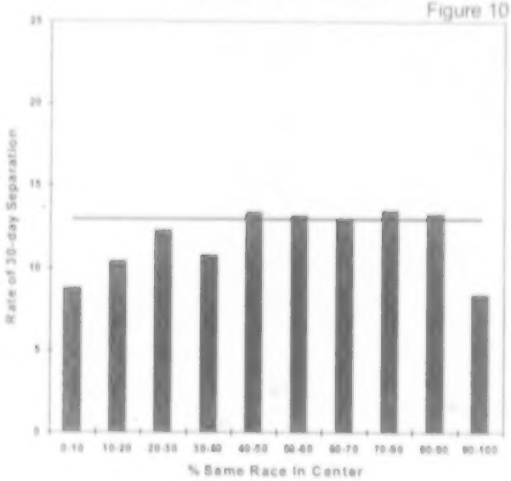
Figure 9



Relationship between 30-day Separation and Same-Race Representation

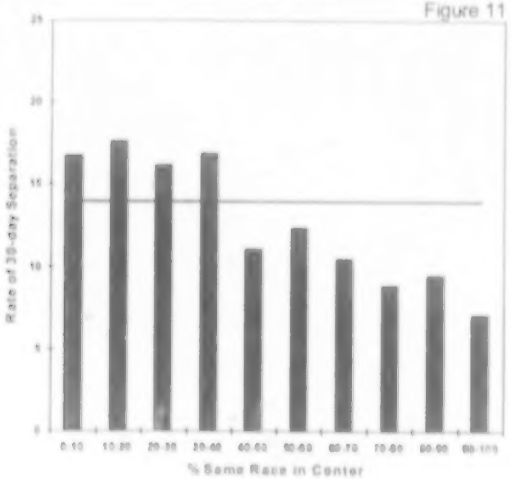
African American

Figure 10



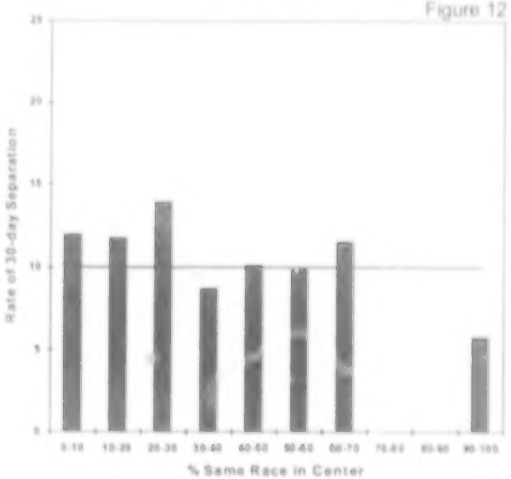
Caucasian

Figure 11



Hispanic

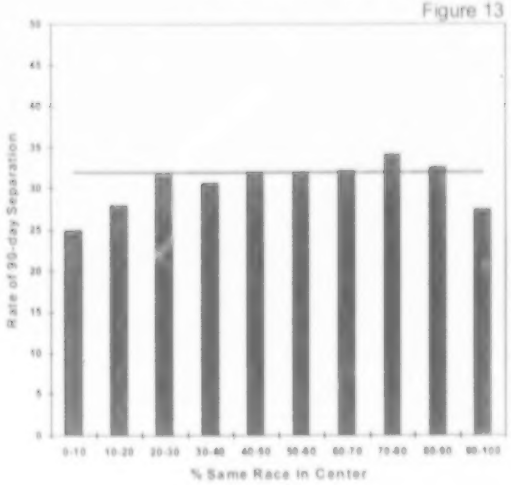
Figure 12



Relationship between 90-day Separation and Same-Race Representation

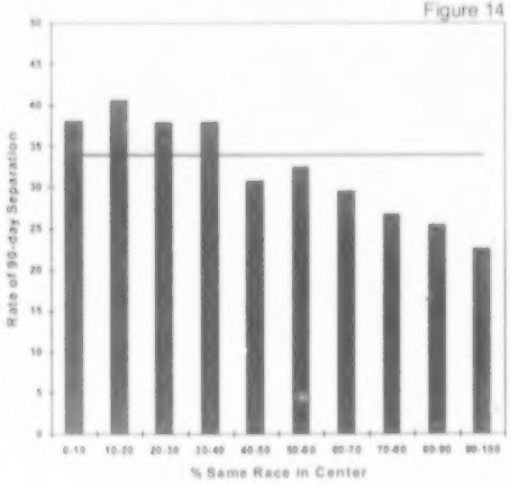
African American

Figure 13



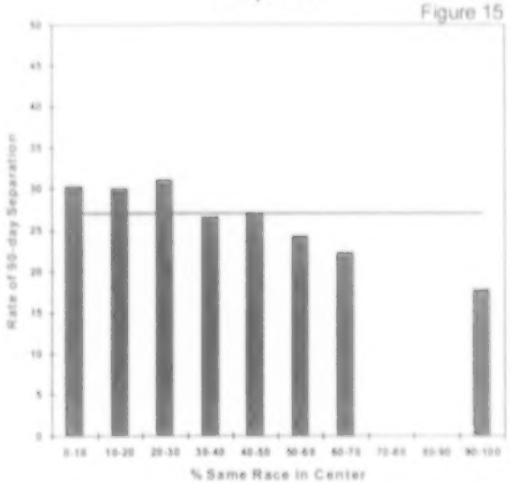
Caucasian

Figure 14



Hispanic

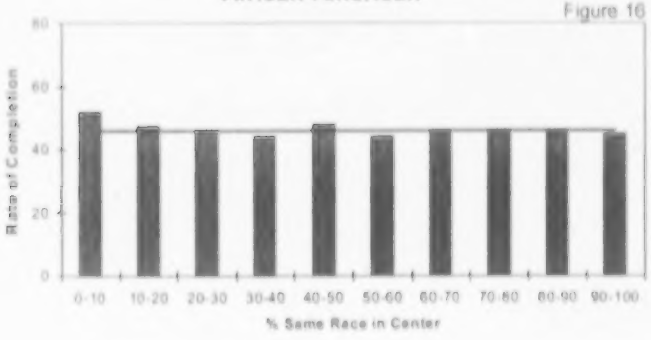
Figure 15



Relationship between Completion and Same-Race Representation

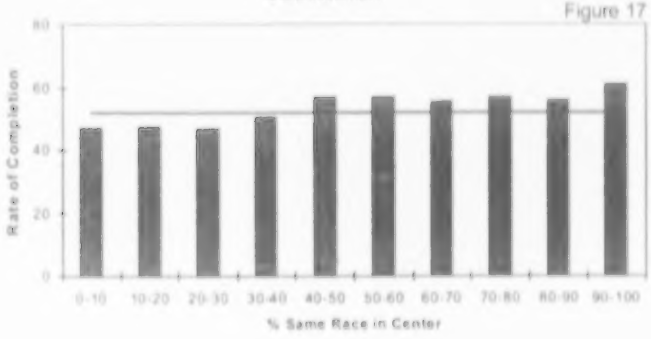
African-American

Figure 16



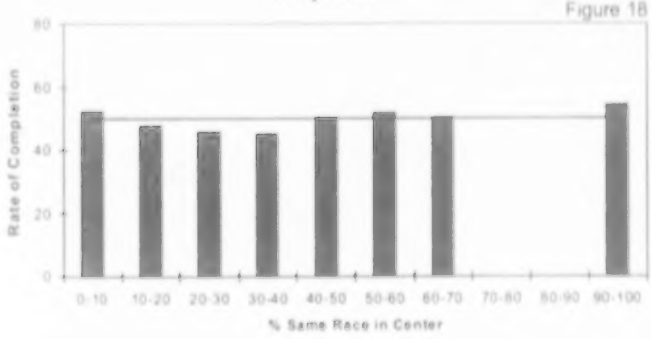
Caucasian

Figure 17



Hispanic

Figure 18



Discussion of the Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data analysis has delineated both student and program characteristics that are associated with more successful outcomes as well as those that are associated with early dropout.

Important gender differences were identified. Logistic regression modeling revealed that females were 25% more likely to be retained at 30 days, 21% more likely to be retained at 90 days, and 10% more likely to complete the program with a GED and/or vocational trade. Women were also less likely to be separated for disciplinary reasons. Women were more likely to be retained on centers with at least 40% female students than were women at centers with lower percentages of females. Conversely, men were more likely to leave early on centers that had a strong male predominance (60% or greater), and more likely to stay on centers that were heavily dominated by females.

The age of Job Corps students also impacted their outcomes. When controlled for all other factors in the logistic regression, an additional year of age made a student 6% more likely to be retained at 30 days than a student a year younger, 8% more likely to be retained at 90 days and 12% more likely to separate with a GED and/or vocational trade completed. There also was an association between younger age and an increased likelihood that the student would be separated for disciplinary reasons or go absent without leave (AWOL).

Outcomes varied between students of different races and socioeconomic status. In general, the Asian/Pacific Islander students did best and the Native Americans fared most poorly. Hispanics were 30% more likely than Caucasians to complete the program. African-Americans and Caucasians had comparable outcomes. Students who also had been on public assistance were 18% less likely to still be on center at 90 days and 20% less likely to complete the program.

Educational attainment also influenced outcomes. Students who obtained a GED or high school diploma and students with better initial math and reading test scores also had better outcomes both for retention and completion. Educational attainment prior to Job Corps was also consistently related to outcomes. Further, students who were coming to Job Corps to participate in a bilingual program to enhance their English capabilities were substantially more likely to have positive outcomes.

Marital status and having dependents were strongly associated with retention. Single students were 38% more likely to both remain in the program at 90 days and to complete the program. Students with dependents were 13% less likely to complete the program. These results suggest that relationships outside of the program influenced students' ability to achieve success in Job Corps.

The student's knowledge about the facilities and program prior to orientation seemed to significantly affect retention. Students whose admissions process began on a center had a 25% better chance of remaining in the program at 30 days and a 15% better chance of still being in the program at 90 days. It is beyond the scope of this report to consider whether admissions officers located on centers are somehow different from those off centers. However, it is probable that students interviewed on center had the opportunity to see the center and, therefore, had a better idea of what to expect when they enrolled.

Students' reasons for leaving the program differed according to the time of their departure. Most enrollees who leave before the sixth month separate predominantly for disciplinary reasons or go AWOL. After that point, most students who leave have completed the program. It is clear, therefore that if Job Corps is to influence attrition it must lower primarily the AWOL/Disciplinary separations in the first several months after enrollment. In order to address this problem, special attention should be given to the demographic characteristics of those students at risk of early separation. Our analysis demonstrated significant differences between the genders, race, and age groups in terms of the number of students who left for AWOL/Disciplinary reasons.

Separations related to zero tolerance (ZT) of substance abuse have accounted for 6.7 % of all separations since ZT was mandated in 1994. Students who have relied on substances for dealing with their problems may have great difficulty in becoming independent of substances during stressful times of adjustment. Job Corps has counselors in place to help youth with this transition. Further study may be warranted to explore how best to keep young people free of drugs in the Job Corps setting. One strategy is suggested in Chapter IV.

Despite these problems, effective solutions are possible. The simplest approach likely to decrease early separations would be to assure that students are adequately familiarized with the program before they enroll. Those students whose admissions process occurred on center were substantially more likely to remain beyond the first 30 days. Assuring that students know what

to expect before enrollment may appropriately deter students who can not adapt to center rules or who would somehow be disappointed with available resources on center.

The different separation rates between genders, races, and age cohorts due to AWOL/Disciplinary action may indicate a problem, and suggest a solution, at the staff level. The staff may not be trained to recognize the unique problems faced by the different genders, races, or age groups. Specifically, in escalated situations, the staff may not employ conflict-resolution techniques appropriate for that person or persons, thereby further alienating the student. Age is the easiest subgroup in which to illustrate this phenomenon. Sixteen and 17 year olds are challenging to all adults. Because of their need to gain increasing autonomy, they are by nature rebellious. It is not surprising that they have more disciplinary separations, and it would be expected that staff would have the most difficulty interacting with them. However, staff well-versed in the stages of youth development and trained how to engage youth of this age rather than conflict with them would be able to deescalate many interactions that could otherwise lead to a disciplinary separation (See Chapter 4). Next, different cultural groups may react to authority in a different manner. If a staff member expects a uniform reaction, they may not be equipped to handle the conflicts as they arise.

This analysis did illuminate many problems; however, it could be improved. First, the analysis was performed on a sample drawn from five years, but did not distinguish between program years. It may, therefore, have missed trends that developed over the years in response to program initiatives. Second, it was conducted using an existing database. Therefore, the research team was reliant on existing data as mentioned earlier and some variables that the team believed were likely to have highly predictive value were not available. To overcome this limitation, the available quantitative data was supplemented with qualitative methods designed to generate, prioritize, and explain unmeasured variables. Future work should be prospective in design and attentive to personal and institutional characteristics that may account for successes which are not currently collected.

It is important to understand the limitations of the quantitative data. Even the best fitting logistic regression models presented in this chapter were able to only modestly improve the ability to predict the outcomes of interest. This suggests that many pivotal factors affecting early dropout or long retention remain unmeasured. These unmeasured factors include those personal characteristics that allow an individual to grasp an opportunity for change. Examples of these

unmeasured personal characteristics include motivation, attitude, emotional health, and resilience. Further, outside obligations to relatives or friends at home that may override a student's desire to remain on center are largely not measured. However, the influence of these outside forces is suggested by the finding that married students and students with dependents are less likely to stay in the program. A large part of the individual's experience within Job Corps, including his/her interactions with peers and staff, was not available for analysis. In order to examine some of the subtle and sometimes immeasurable variables, we turned to a qualitative analysis, which gave Job Corps students, staff, and administrators the opportunity to shed light on the factors that influence retention and to suggest possibilities for improvement.

CHAPTER 3 - QUALITATIVE INSIGHT

This study utilized a mixed quantitative-qualitative design to obtain the clearest picture of the factors that contribute to student retention. Quantitative analysis is limited by the data available. Because it does not include personal characteristics of students (e.g. motivation, attitude, perceptions, their experience of the program), it is unlikely to be able to describe how an individual chooses to stay or to leave. In other words, it can say who leaves and when they leave, but it is not capable of shedding insight into why they leave or how they make the decision to leave. In fact, the logistic regression models produced for this report were able to increase our ability to predict retention only modestly. This confirms that many of the factors that explain retention are currently unmeasured variables. Qualitative research is able to shed some light on these unmeasured factors. It facilitates individuals to share their insights and their expertise. In this case, it allowed them to offer in-depth descriptions of what unmeasured program, student, or staff characteristics might contribute to the decision to leave or to stay.

Qualitative research tries to gain insight from experts. The operative question of this research is, "What factors contribute to attrition and retention?" The experts capable of best answering this question are not theorists or academics, but those closest to the situation at hand. Further, if the findings of this report are translated into action, the incorporation of expertise and insight from within Job Corps will diminish the perception that the action plan was externally-developed. Data are collected from students, staff, center directors, orientation managers, and regional mental health consultants using the Nominal Group Technique, focus groups, Delphi survey, and on-site observation. These techniques and their findings will be described in sections I through IV of this chapter.

The Group Techniques and on-site observation were conducted during five three-day site visits that took place between January and May, 1998. The following sites were visited:

- Philadelphia, PA – (Region III, non-residential site)
- Blackwell , WI – (Region V)
- Clearfield , UT – (Region VIII)
- Miami , FL – (Region IV)
- Tongue Point , OR – (Region X)

Section I – Nominal Group Technique

Nominal Group Technique (NGT) elicits each individual's ideas, allows members to build upon others' ideas, and facilitates the members through a structured prioritization process (Delbecq 1975; Moore 1987). It is called "Nominal" Group Technique because it is a group in name only. It is structured in a manner that diminishes the inherent limitations of group processes that prohibit prioritization. NGT has great advantages over other focus group techniques in that conflicting ideas are more likely to be tolerated, facilitator bias is minimized, all participants can equally influence decision-making, and the group arrives at conclusions. However, in comparison to more open group techniques, it is limited in two major ways. First, it is a one-question technique, thus limiting members' opportunity to address multiple issues. Second, unlike group techniques with an open format, it collects lists of responses rather than rich descriptive explanation. Because of its advantages and limitations in comparison with open group techniques, it has been used in complementary fashion with focus groups in previous work to collect the adolescent viewpoint (Ginsburg, Menapace, and Slap 1997; Ginsburg et al. 1995, Rhein et al. 1997).

Separate NGT sessions were held for students and staff which allowed these groups to generate and prioritize their own ideas. At each center, the Center Director was asked to randomly choose three groups of students and two groups of staff to participate in the separate NGT sessions. It was requested that each group consist of eight or nine participants, but some groups were smaller.

NGT Question

Students and staff in NGT groups responded to the following question: "What determines whether a young person at Job Corps will succeed?" Success was defined as "reaching or at least moving towards a person's own positive goals." Participants were asked to consider student, staff, and program attributes that they felt would contribute to a student's success. This question was left more open-ended than one that would have directly asked about drop-out. Students that piloted the question understood that it would be inclusive of issues that would describe why students might not succeed or drop-out. The research team acknowledges the bias toward collecting more positive responses, but we did so to avoid collecting a list of complaints.

Participants

According to standard recommendations for conducting NGT (Moore 1987), groups convened until no new ideas were generated. Fifteen student groups and 10 staff groups were conducted. NGT sessions resulted in a total of 209 unique student ideas and 122 unique staff ideas. A total of 117 students participated in this phase of data collection. Of these, 61% were male, 53% were African-American, 27% were white, 16% were Hispanic, and 3% were from other racial groups. Only 5% of students were 16 years of age, 34% were 17-18 years, 32% were 19-20 years, and 28% were 21 years or older. A total of 63 staff members participated in this phase of data collection. Of these, 52% were male, and the mean length of service to Job Corps was 7.4 ± 4.9 (SD) years.

Statistical Analysis

Items generated by NGT were ranked separately for students and staff according to their sum scores from the facilitated prioritization process. Each item generated could have been given a score of 1 to 5 if it were selected among the top 5 responses by the participant. Items not selected received a score of zero. Data was entered using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA) and analyzed using SPSS (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Student and staff responses were ordered separately by their sum scores. Items which received the same score were assigned the same ranking.

Results

Responses included in the top 20 ranks are reported in Table 1 (students) and Table 2 (staff). A more in depth understanding of participants' views on items receiving the highest rankings will be offered through the complementary descriptive data shared in the focus groups.

Table 1. Nominal Group Technique (NGT) items generated by students.

Item	Rank	Score
Student attitude	1	69
Student is culturally aware/tolerant	2	43
Student's choice to be here, not someone else's	3	41
Better security on center	3	41
Better pay for students	4	40
More active staff/teaching roles	4	40
Staff respects students	5	38
Student follows rules	5	38
Student stays focused	6	37
Staff treat students like adults	7	36
Student has strong ambition/will to succeed	8	35
Fewer rules on center	9	33
Student is willing to work hard	10	28
More trades to choose from	10	28
Tutors available	11	27
Student is determined/motivated	12	26
Student sets realistic goals	13	24
Less strict rules	14	22
Mutual respect between students and staff	15	21
Better policy for student emergencies	15	21
Student wants or has a GED	16	20
Staff understands students	16	20
More opportunities for students to obtain GED	17	19
Better food on center	17	19
Job Corps needs to be more organized	17	19
Make hands-on training in trades	18	18
Student has self-confidence	19	17
Student has the ability/desire to change	20	16
More computer access on center	20	16

Table 2. Nominal Group Technique (NGT) items generated by staff.

Item	Rank	Score
Student is motivated/determined	1	69
Student is committed	2	39
Students need to take responsibility/accountability	3	34
Staff are interested in student success/here for students	4	32
Effective/fair discipline	5	26
Encouragement/motivation by staff	6	25
Staff listens/counsels	7	24
Student has social/communication skills	8	22
Student accepts rules	8	22
Individualized/flexible programs	9	21
Student is willing to change	9	21
Feedback by staff	10	20
Student ability to/experience achieve goals	10	20
Student has an adequate transition to life after Job Corps	10	20
Staff are positive role models	11	19
Respect between students/staff	11	19
Self-esteem	12	18
Student has resiliency/is able to overcome obstacles	12	18
Student stays drug-free	12	18
Student has a positive attitude	12	18
Student's employability	13	17
Student believes in the possibility of success	14	16
Student has goals	15	13
Availability of vocation of interest on center	15	13
Student understands expectations and atmosphere of Job Corps	15	13
Student overcomes obstacles	15	13
Student attendance	16	12
Communication between students/staff	16	12
Professional staff	17	11
Student is self-aware	18	10
Student has self-confidence	18	10
Flexible program	18	10
Student's training is matched to skill level	18	10
Student knowledge coming in	18	10
Student has life skills	18	10
Student stays focused	19	9
Special program structure	19	9
Student's outward appearance	20	8
Accountability of staff	20	8
Students ask for help (counseling)	20	8
Student ability to learn	20	8
Staff helps student set goals	20	8
Staff sends consistent messages	20	8

Section II – Focus Groups

Focus groups are a commonly used means of obtaining descriptive data from a population. Essentially, a focus group consists of a group of people with shared expertise in an area of interest to a researcher. A trained facilitator keeps the group focused on the task question. Unlike NGT groups, the facilitator may move on to related questions based on the flow of the group. A discussion group is a natural means to foster brainstorming. Thus, the cumulative total of ideas generated in a group may be greater than the sum of individual ideas (Rich and Ginsburg 1999; Morgan 1993; Stewart 1990).

Though the facilitator is trained to control group dynamics, an acknowledged limitation of this technique is the bias imposed by influential members of the group. A person may be influential based on power or psychosocial dynamics (e.g. appearance, outspokenness, etc.). Therefore, while the quality of the data is often rich, it may best represent the views of a few individuals. In fact, a less popular view may be minimally discussed or not even raised because of the potentially imposing nature of group dynamics.

Separate focus groups were held for students and staff to allow maximum honesty. Center Directors randomly selected groups of students and staff to participate. It was requested that each group include eight participants, but some groups were smaller. All individuals were informed that the sessions would be recorded and results shared with administrators and policy makers, but were assured that no comment would be linked to an individual.

Focus Group Question

The main area explored during the focus groups was "What makes a difference in whether someone will succeed at Job Corps?"

Participants

A total of 103 students participated in 13 Focus Groups; 40% were African American, 34% were white, and 19% were Hispanic; 40% were female; 17% were 16-17 years-old, 22% were 18 years-olds, 35% were 19-20 years old, the remainder were 21 to 24 years-old. Eight-five staff members participated in 13 separate Focus Groups; 49% of them were female and they had a mean of 8.9 years of Job Corps Service $\pm$ 6.3 years (1 standard deviation).

Results

Results of the open focus groups will be shared using direct quotations from the participants. Though software packages exist that code concepts in an effort to quantify the qualitative results (Richards and Richards 1997; Seidel 1998; Muhr 1997; Hesse-Biber 1998), this research team has chosen not to use this form of analysis. First, it is not necessary in this case since the NGT groups have offered a prioritized listing of ideas. Second, it may give a biased inaccurate reporting of results. Youth in focus groups, even when well facilitated, often speak at the same time, making the transcription difficult during the times that youth are most excited. Also, the amount of time spent on any given topic is heavily controlled by the facilitator. Thus quantification in this scenario biases results more heavily toward facilitator interests. Direct quotation keeps the results closest to the views expressed by participants. In fact, only the minimal amount of explanation needed to organize the quotations will be offered here.

"Success" was described by one staff member as "getting the kids to get out of where they are and let them have a dream." Another staff member stated, "I think just making a goal is a success. If you have a goal and you make a goal, then that is a success." Another staff member felt success could come in small steps:

> [Students] must have more realistic goals - for example, if they improve their reading by two levels while they're here, that's a success. Many are Learning Disabled and don't know it. Maybe success is just figuring out who is... and teaching them how to learn better or sending them back to school in the right program.

The basic forces that influence a person's long-term success (i.e., staying in or leaving the program) is summarized nicely by one male student:

> Determination of a person... When you come up here you see what you want to do before you come... So you have set in your mind basically what kind of trade [and] how far you think you are going to get in your education. Your plan, most of the time, is to finish. But sometimes you think, "if I can get this far then that will be good enough for me, then I can go back home." The only thing... that's going to get you there is your determination that nothing's going to stop you.

The determination of which the above student speaks summarizes many of the top-ranked items in the NGT groups. The top-ranked item by students in the NGT groups was student attitude. Other similar items that were ranked highly included student has strong ambition/will to succeed, student is willing to work hard, student is determined/motivated, student has self-confidence, and student has the ability/desire to change. The top-ranked item by staff in the

NGT groups was student is motivated/determined. Related items include second ranked student is committed, student has a positive attitude, student believes in the possibility of success, and student self-confidence. While these items are not identical in meaning, they are often discussed together by focus group participants.

Some staff members pointed out that, at the least, students had to have, at their core, a desire to change their life situation and the remaining hope that made them believe their efforts would be worthwhile.

> I think ultimately they still need that ray of hope in them that hasn't been beaten to nonexistence… I think it is still in them for whatever reason where it may not be in their friends or family members. Maybe it is just pure survival instinct where they say I am not going to end up like that and I can do something to change it. Maybe it is just emotional stamina. That they may have been beat down – but not so far that they don't see alternatives.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> If they come in with hope, with one little grain of hope, those are the ones that will eventually be successful.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> They [staff] need to help you get a better paying job. Better than you have had your whole life.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Some staff described desperate life situations the students had experienced and implied that the first step toward being motivated to change may have been hitting rock bottom.

> A lot of our kids because of whatever happened on the streets, they come here... I don't want to end up like my home-boy... He's dead. My cousin is dead, my brother is dead. I don't want to end up like that and if I kept living the life I was that's my future so a lot of it is the circumstance that they are leaving. That send them here going, "oh my God, if I don't do something I am going to be... My life expectancy is 6 more months or whatever.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> A lot of this all comes down to their family history and stuff. They have looked at where their family is alot of them come from poverty and stuff and after a while they know this is what I am looking at 5-10-20 years if I don't do something at this point in their life or they have to do something or they are going to be in the same boat as their parents.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Having a firm attitude and a strong commitment to change was a recurrent theme:

> Getting your trade diploma, getting a good job, that's success. To us it is big, it took a lot of sacrifices we had to make, a lot of inner motivation, to us that's

success- getting what we came for, getting our career going. We're at the bottom but soon we'll get there.

-Male Job Corps Student

Your attitude man, you got to be good. That's what will make you succeed.

-Male Job Corps Student

Meet your goals and then learn to have higher goals.

-Female Job Corps Student

Dream or visualize yourself as a success when you're feeling down.

-Female Job Corps Student

If you don't want to prepare yourself, don't come up here. If you're looking… to mess around, you get sent back. If you are not committed to yourself and your education to stick it out – however long it takes to get trained – don't bother to come.

-Female Job Corps Student

I know I want something. And if you don't have the want, you are not going to do it.

-Male Job Corps Student

They have a dream right now and they are scared and hungry enough to try and get it….They want the dream, they are going to go against their parents, against whomever else…

-Job Corps Staff Member

This is like a second chance for making your life better.

-Female Job Corps Student

If you want to change yourself, make your goal to get some money in the future. You can come here and try, it won't hurt for you to try. Give yourself a chance to try, check it out. If you like it you stay; it won't hurt you.

-Female Job Corps Student

I don't like it when someone is telling me I can't… You just have to have it in you to say I can.

-Female Job Corps Student

Some students admitted that the drive may come from their commitment to make someone else's life better.

My son is the one who motivates me… to get up every morning, to be a good role model, someone he can look up to be a good influence. That's the reason I came to Job Corps – to make a good life for my son.

-Female Job Corps Student

On the other hand, if a student came only because of someone else's suggestion, it was seen as unlikely that their commitment would stay firm.

Whether you want to be here. If you don't, just leave and get on with your life.

-Male Job Corps Student

> If you make up your decision to come here… not have people force you and make you come… then I think you will be successful. … Sometimes people don't know why they are here, they are just here, then I say go home, you aren't taking the first step.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Students and staff recognized that for many of the students their commitment to succeed, despite the odds, was generated from strong messages from their home.

> Someone, as they came up, let them know that they could do it differently… Somebody got through to them. -Job Corps Staff Member

> What helped me was my elders, my relatives, they are the ones who told me what life is all about.
>
> - Female Job Corps Student

> Yeah, I think the kids that I've seen that are most successful are the kinds that have somebody back home in their corner. They've got somebody who taught them values and that they know is behind them.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Staff recognized that learning who their "home cheering section" is can be critical in getting a young person through a crisis on site.

> Okay when I first start with the kids, I get to know them a little bit... talk about their families, where did they come from, what brought them to Job Corps. What are their goals? …why he came here. And almost always it's grandma… So when we have a problem with that kid,… Right now I've got a kid who wanted to go home. He demanded to go home. I got his paperwork together and I said you know what? Let's call grandma, she's the one who encouraged you to come. We made the phone call and guess what? We were pulling back his paperwork. All he had to hear was from grandma saying you have nothing here. There is no one here to take care of you. I can't do it. Mom and dad have thrown you out. So we have to use that rooting section the whole time they are here. Right up until the week that they graduate.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Both staff and student's repeatedly acknowledged the importance of staff supporting or encouraging students in a way that builds their confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Several implied that this encouragement may have been lacking previously in students' lives.

> If you want people to make it you need to tell people, "Hey, you are doing a good job." Don't worry about the numbers, they will come.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> They do come here and hook on with one of the staff just to get a positive in their life because nobody in their whole life has ever said you are worth something so they want to get somewhere where somebody will tell them that.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

It means a lot to you (saying I'm proud of you), saying your special. Yeah it does a lot. You can tell that you have achieved something.

-Job Corps Student

I think that a lot of it has to do with encouragement from the staff. You know the dudes that hang in there when you are really wanting to leave… a lot of it has to do with encouraging you to stay, giving support.

-Job Corps Student

A lot of kids come from places that put them down… don't tell them that they are doing good. And then when they come to Job Corps and are told, "You can do it," "I heard that you did good in this class." …Just knowing that people care gives them motivation.

-Job Corps Staff Member

It is the little things they want praise for. They will come into your office, oh look what I did today! I got a 100 on this test! And you say okay, good for you. See you can do anything you want to do if you just put your mind to it. That's what they are looking for. They are looking for praise… somebody that will say, you did a good job, you can do it.

-Job Corps Staff Member

There was a man in Colorado that took a big forklift and drove over a bunch of buildings. The sheriff of that town had just left Job Corps. He called and asked his instructor, did I do a good job?

-Job Corps Staff Member

Teach them that they are somebody. That they are important, [build] self-esteem… More important than teaching them how to cook [is] teaching them that they can accomplish something.

-Job Corps Staff Member

The most important thing you can do for [a] child is confidence. Everything else will fall into place. But they have to have confidence and a feeling of self-worth first.

-Job Corps Staff Member

You can teach a kid how to bake a batch of cookies. He can also learn that on the job. But if I give that kid the confidence he needs, he can go into that job anyway. And they do that with leadership training - basic and advanced. In our trade, we make them supervisor for the week. We pat them on the back when they do something. I try to let them take a little treat out to their counselor. Yesterday they did brownies, so they could each take a brownie to their counselor. When that counselor gives them a hug and says those were the best brownies in the world, that gives them that confidence [so] they can do the work in the restaurant.

-Job Corps Staff Member

Another way of building self-confidence and preparing teens for life after Job Corps is to get them involved in the day-to-day operations of the Center.

> Making a group of kids responsible for the cooking each night not only gives them a sense of responsibility, but also gives them basic math and reading comprehension skills. Also provides them with an opportunity to apply knowledge to real life.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> Something else we need to teach the kids... we can teach them to work and be responsible. Some can't balance a checkbook, buy groceries, pay rent, and so failure will come with that also. They have the tools, but not the basic everyday things that we all take for granted. And in most cases, there won't be anybody there to help. We need to go farther.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

In general, a great deal of discussion in both the staff and student groups focused on the quality of the staff in terms of their ability to interact with the students and, above all, their ability to demonstrate caring.

> The perfect staff member is... Supportive, respectful (they treat you like an adult, they don't yell when you ask them for help or ignore you purposefully), always there for you, loyal (can tell them anything and they won't tell anybody – confidential), and they'll try to help you in any way they can.
>
> -Job Corps Student

> Last night my wife and I saw Good Will Hunting and I am sitting here listening to this conversation and I am looking at that young man in the movie and I see that same thing with those students here. They are reaching out. They each have something hidden that someone around this table is pulling out... and it makes a big difference when that one student makes it because we don't save them all and we know that.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> We said before those who were successful were those who had someone at home behind them. I think that's true but if they don't have that person, they can find a staff person that they can buy into... Trust means a lot.
>
> -Male Job Corps Staff Member

> I think it's important for even those kids who have that at home that they have that here to have someone behind them here, in their corner that's going to go the extra mile for them.
>
> -Female Job Corps Staff Member

> Students need to find staff... If they can find that one who they know truly... truly cares and works with them. I like to use the word speak with them , not to them. They can sense that if you're phony, they can read through it a mile away. We have one student in one of the dorms who is really excellent. I really believe this student has a lot to do with the new students that come in here because he relates to them. He can talk to them and he doesn't talk down to them, which is another thing. A lot of times I hear we do have a tendency to talk down to the kids and they sense that right away.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member
>
> A staff member who works in our kitchen who I watched her bond... so many of the kids call her grandma. She can get on their case one minute and hug them the next cause they know she loves them. And there's a lot of kids... that's who they bond with.
>
> -Female Job Corps Staff Member

The first thing I tell kids is find a staff that you can trust help you get an education, find a job.

-Female Job Corps Staff Member

Our kids are conflicted...Do I want to listen to other people, or am I gonna do it on my own?...There are kids here that have been leaders in their communities on the street but want somebody to lead them...I don't think they come in consciously saying I want to be a positive leader...They still want what they didn't get from their parents...they all want somebody to listen to them.

-Job Corps Staff Member

Knowing someone cares about them. When some of the students are getting ready to terminate, and when the student knows someone cares what you are doing… We can hold them, give them that extra step, that extra completion… When they know that you care about them… I think that's what just gets them through.

-Job Corps Staff Member

There are a couple RA's that I got… they care but they don't… there are a couple of RA's who say, "How was your day? How [are] you doing? Good morning. Good night…" every night they [staff] say the same old thing, but it's good to hear "good night."

-Female Job Corps Student

Any one who takes the time to help you out, to listen. The RA's that will listen to you, not just tell you what you can and can't do – that's help.

-Female Job Corps Student

One thing I know we… could do a better job of… if there is a troubled kid and [I am] bonding with that kid, let the staff know. If you're having problems with this kid, you can send him to me. I'll talk to them. I'm thinking of a particular student you and I were working with that you wanted to kill, but I bonded with. And we got him through here. Eventually you did bond. But I think as staff, we need to do a better job letting other staff know I can connect with this kid. If you're having problems, you can send him to me. Normally, we think if kids have a problem, we send them off to a counselor, but we're all counselors.

-Job Corps Staff Member

Need to select people that intrinsically care for people and then fine tune them.

-Job Corps Staff Member

You have to get to that level where they can talk to you like a friend, the idea that someone cares about you is so important.

-Job Corps Staff Member

Pay [staff] people more because they are taking the time, working with tough kids…To pass along good skills that they know so you can do better in your life.

-Male Job Corps Student

In fact, many students look to staff as role models.

> I wanted things better in life, better than on the reservations like many of the other Navajos. [There are] not many role models back there... We need better role models.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

> There has to be somebody there to guide you, to help you... to guide you in a better way.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

Because of the importance of building relationships with staff members, both students and staff expressed concern about staff turnover:

> Keep [staff] people here who want to help young people, not people who just want a job.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> You can tell those [staff] that actually care about the students and those who just get the paycheck.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> You have to keep the workers happy first, if they are happy they are going to give you all that they are worth.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> Pay [staff] people more because they are taking the time, working with tough kids...To pass along good skills that they know, so you can do better in your life.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Another critical aspect of the staff-student relationship is "respect." Students repeatedly cited their perception that they were being treated as children as a prime example of disrespect they experienced. Most commonly this was in reference to center rules.

> Once we give them a choice and we respect what their opinion is, they have infinite wisdom.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> I feel that respect is the most needed, most important. There's a lot of disrespect here... write-ups that are petty, [and] shouldn't happen.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> They treat us like little kids... We have to check in many times each night. It's dumb. We're in the middle of the boonies.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

> It doesn't affect our success. It just aggravates you. They treat us like we're 11 years old.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> Rules get in your way and inhibit your success.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Older students particularly resented not being treated differently than younger students.

> You should be able to leave without…sign[ing] out. I think they could handle it different. Maybe if you're under 18, you are restricted from certain things. But when you are 20, 21 and older, you ought to be able to do certain things here.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

One female student perceived that males and females on site were expected to abide by different levels of restriction.

> We're being punished for what's happened in the past. Especially the women… the guys get to do anything... Smoking at 2AM. We have to wait until 5AM to go smoke. Saturday night after 11PM when I go to get my medication, there's all kinds of guys outside smoking and we got to be in bed. It's not right.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

Sometimes students believed that staff inflexibility around rules illustrated that they did not really care about students.

> Rules need to be bent sometimes, if you care about the kids.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

> We are all young adults and sometimes we make mistakes. But if you really care about us – like some of them say they do – then why kick them out? …There's a lot of politics here.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

One staff member stated that rules without compassion could lead to attrition.

> They have to have structure. But the fact is that if you have no compassion for a person that is here, they will go home.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Some participants described how inappropriate staff interactions could set in motion inappropriate student behavior. This was seen as particularly relevant since negative encounters with staff can lead to disciplinary separations.

> It's the way you talk to people. I know when I was 17, you couldn't tell me anything. When you need to tell people things, you need to come at if from a different angle… [A] person that's 17 or 18, depends on their attitude… [If] you tell them around their friends to do something, to them you are trying to show
>
> them up in front of their friends. Therefore you started a confrontation.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> Their coping skills usually involve aggression. If a staff member "comes back" at a kid, their natural reaction is to fight. Then, because of zero tolerance for violence, we have to kick them out. Staff needs to be able to stop for a minute and think before they react, realizing that their reacting may cause a kid to be kicked out permanently.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Staff generally saw the ability to follow rules as an important step toward taking personal responsibility for one's actions and becoming prepared to reenter society and the workplace.

> They are learning responsibilities for their actions. They have learned how to achieve something and they have the self-esteem [to know] that they are responsible for what they achieve here. Starting to think for themselves and be responsible and trying to make the right choices.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> You can't just teach them the rules, they have to have some meaning to them... Most of them know the rules of society. They don't have a reason to apply them to themselves.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Other staff members seemed to believe that rules were good for students regardless of the specific content. On one center, students were instructed never to walk on the grass and frequently cited this rule as one that seemed particularly overbearing or unnecessary. This came up in one staff group and the facilitator asked the participants to explain the rationale of the rule. The interchange follows:

> Female Staff Member: They don't want to take their earrings out of their noses, or they don't want to take it out of their tongue, or they want to walk on the grass. The kids want to walk anywhere they want to walk. They don't think that they should get written up for walking on this grass.
>
> Facilitator: Why are we picking that battle here? [Referring to walking on the grass]
>
> Another Female Job Corps Staff Member: I can give you an example. Between the two buildings here, the kids typically like to cut across. One winter there was a snow path there and the kids... And in spring you had this big yellow patch there. Part of what we believe at our center is that we try to keep our center looking nice, have our students take pride in the center, and that didn't look very nice.
>
> Male Job Corps Staff Member: I try to explain to the students, throughout life your gonna have rules and regulations whether you set them yourself or someone else sets them. They have to be followed whether you like them or not.

Adaptation to center rules is only one of the adjustments students need to make to center life if they are to successfully acclimate. There was an acknowledgement among staff that the transition is dramatic, and begins on orientation day.

> They're pulled out of an environment they're used to and taken into a group of 30-40 new people that they're living with 24 hours a day. We are regulating what they do and when they do it, we've changed their whole habit.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> A lot of what we're talking about comes down to what students learn on orientation day and that's maturity and responsibility so they can make the right choices... and take responsibility for their actions here.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> How quickly and smoothly the transition is to Job Corps. How quickly they can adapt to being here. It's not as easy to make the transition as they thought it would be... They can't go to the mall and they can't do this, and they can't do that. They have to get up and go to school, and get up and go to work--not get up and spend the day at shopping malls.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

Students talked about exposure to cultural diversity as a new experience. In the group setting, they uniformly described it as positive.

> It's a good thing (getting to know other people of other cultures) because everybody, the class and the group relationships are different. They keep us mixed up as a rule, different people in a room together.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> When you leave here you never forget it. Because... you've never seen so many different, diverse kind of people. You know what I mean?
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

> It's important to have an open mind about what other people think, have an open mind to diversity.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

> I like having a diverse group, you already know what your culture is like. I want to learn what everybody else is like.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Students also spoke about the importance of peer influence. They implied that such influence could have a positive or negative effect.

> Peers have to do a lot [with success], because they have been through it. They can tell you what to expect when you are going to a new class.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

> You need a much more positive aura in your dorm, because that's where you spend the majority of your time, if you can get rid of the negativity, and then it's more positive.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Students often spoke about disappointment when they arrived at the center because it did not match expectations they claim were made by admissions counselors. Furthermore, students stated when they felt that they were misinformed by the Admissions Counselors they became resentful and were more likely to leave.

> I was told by my recruiter that there's a horse farm on this site. Well, there's no horse farm on this center. And there's a swimming pool. There's a Burger King across the street, but we can't cross the street.
>
> -Male Job Corps Student

Some students and staff also spoke of the deep disappointment students felt whey they were unable to start in the trade of their choice. Students and staff concurred that students should not be placed on long waiting lists for their trade of choice, nor should they be forced to enter another trade.

> Not only that, the trades all have waiting lists. And they are long - usually a 3-6 month wait to get in. Instead of saying to the students before they get here what trade would you like to go into? Oh, there's a waiting list. They bring them in, force them into another trade that they don't want to be in and they get up in that trade and they aren't getting what they came here for. A lot of their failure happens because of the fact that they can't get the trades that they want and are told you go into this one 'cause it's not full. And so they get frustrated, in trouble, take kids with them, etc.
>
> -Job Corps Staff Member

> They don't have the trades I want. I didn't want to go here.
>
> -Female Job Corps Student

Section III – Delphi Technique Surveys

The Delphi Technique survey is a group process that is designed to transcend the limitation of geography. It allows a group of experts to define problems or develop solutions without ever actually meeting. The process uses a series of surveys to explore a topic. The first survey is open-ended to allow the participants to generate a broad range of ideas. The responses are collected and shared with the participants in a second-round survey. The process continues until the participants have either come to consensus or developed appropriate solutions. (Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson 1975)

The research team wanted to gather insight on student retention from Center Directors, because they have oversight of center performance and understand how regional and/or national policies might best address retention, and Orientation Managers because they oversee students' critical acclimation period. Therefore, these administrators from the 30 centers with the highest and lowest retention rates in program year 1998 were asked to participate.

Round I surveys were designed to be an open ended means to explore the most important student and center characteristics affecting student retention in the past 90 days. The top responses from this survey were then included, in random order, on Round II surveys which were used to prioritize items. Both surveys (with instructions and spaces allowed for written answers omitted) are included below. Participants were aware that they "may be directly, but anonymously, quoted in the report."

Center Directors

Round I Survey

1A. **Please list student characteristics that you believe determine *whether or not* a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days.** This list can include characteristics that increase the likelihood of dropout/separation as well as those that protect against student dropout/separation. You may include any of the following characteristics: (1) those that reflect a student's current emotional state or behavior; (2) those that describe his/her more permanent character traits; and (3) those that are permanent and descriptive, such as gender, age, and education level.

List as many characteristics as you like as part of your brainstorming process. Then, circle the **5** items that you believe most determine whether or not a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days. Finally, from among the circled items, place a star next to the **2** most important characteristics.

1B. If you believe that any of your top five choices needs further explanation, please use this space to define or elaborate.

2A. **Please list center characteristics that you believe most influence *whether or not* a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days.** This list can include center characteristics that increase the likelihood of dropout/separation as well as those that protect against student dropout/separation. The listed center characteristics can be programmatic, staff related, or structural, including location and physical layout.

List as many characteristics as you like as part of your brainstorming process. Then, circle the **5** items that you believe most influence whether or not a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days. Finally, from among the circled items, place a star next to the **2** most important characteristics.

2B. If you believe that any of your top five choices needs further explanation, please use this space to define or elaborate

3A. Look at the five **student characteristics** you selected as those that most determine *whether or not* a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days. Describe what the center or center staff might be able to do to enhance any of the favorable characteristics or change any of the negative characteristics.

3B. Look at the five **center characteristics** you selected as those that most influence *whether or not* a student will continue in the program beyond his/her first 90 days. Based on your list, describe what changes the center might be able to make to minimize those factors that contribute to dropout or separation and maximize those factors that increase student retention.

3C. What policies or programs do you think the National Job Corps Office could implement that could best support centers and center staff to respond to the issues you have raised in this worksheet?

Round II Survey

In the previous survey, Center Directors generated each of the following ideas. Please use the following scale to rate the relative effect of each idea on student retention. *Please circle only one response per item.*

0 **no effect** on retention	1 **minimal effect** on retention	2 **moderate effect** on retention			3 **major effect** on retention
1. Center recreational activities		0	1	2	3
2. Center location		0	1	2	3
3. Student homesickness		0	1	2	3
4. Student is respectful of self and others		0	1	2	3
5. Student history of drug or alcohol use		0	1	2	3
6. Student gang affiliation		0	1	2	3
7. Student has children		0	1	2	3
8. Center safety		0	1	2	3
9. Student age		0	1	2	3
10. Student entered Job Corps based on his/her choice, not based on the strong influence of others		0	1	2	3
11. Staff demonstrates a caring attitude		0	1	2	3
12. Consistent/fair enforcement of rules		0	1	2	3
13. Student academic ability		0	1	2	3
14. Student has an outside support system		0	1	2	3
15. Student motivation		0	1	2	3
16. Student receives positive reinforcement from staff		0	1	2	3
17. Student ability to follow rules/obey authority		0	1	2	3
18. Student commitment		0	1	2	3
19. Center maintenance		0	1	2	3
20. Cultural diversity on Center		0	1	2	3
21. Dorm/residence cleanliness		0	1	2	3
22. Open and effective communication between staff and students		0	1	2	3
23. Quality medical services on site		0	1	2	3
24. Student education level		0	1	2	3
25. Availability of the student's desired trade on site		0	1	2	3
26. Student maturity level		0	1	2	3
27. Student has strong relationship ties off Center (e.g., partner, spouse, child, etc.)		0	1	2	3
28. Student bonds with staff		0	1	2	3
29. Student is focused/has specific goals		0	1	2	3
30. Comfortable center/dormitory environment		0	1	2	3
31. Student was misinformed about center facilities		0	1	2	3
32. Student feels accepted/welcomed by other students and staff		0	1	2	3
33. Student has emotional difficulties		0	1	2	3
34. Quality of food on center		0	1	2	3
35. Quality orientation program		0	1	2	3

Thank you for your valuable input!

Survey Results

First-round surveys were returned by 48 (80%) of the 60 Center Directors surveyed. At the time of the first survey, Treasure Island was in transition from an advanced vocation center to a comprehensive center and was therefore excluded from analysis. Therefore, percentages are based on the number of usable sites surveyed (n=59). There were no differences in participation between sites with high and low retention rates. Of the 29 centers from the top quartile, 24 (83%) returned surveys while 24 (80%) of 30 sites in the low quartile returned surveys.

Second-round surveys were completed by 51 (85%) of the 60 Center Directors surveyed. There were no differences in participation between sites with high and low retention rates. Of the 30 centers from the top quartile, 26 (87%) returned surveys while 25 (83%) of 30 sites in the low quartile returned surveys. The 35 top items on Round I – which became the items for the Round II survey – are listed in Table 3 according to their mean ratings from Round II.

The marginal homogeneity test was used to compare the mean ratings of consecutive items until a statistically significant difference was found ($p<.05$). Items demonstrating no significant difference were assigned the same rank. The first item with a statistically different mean was assigned the next consecutive rank. For example, item 1 was compared to item 2. If the comparison was non-significant, item 1 and item 2 were given the same rank. Then, item 1 was compared to item 3. If this comparison was statistically significant, item 3 was given rank 2 and was then compared to items 4, 5, and so on until the next statistically significant difference was found. This process divided the 35 items into five distinct ranks.

Table 3. Center Director survey items listed by rank order.

Item	Mean Score	Rank
Staff demonstrates a caring attitude	2.84	1
Student commitment	2.78	1
Student feels accepted/welcomed by other students and staff	2.76	1
Open and effective communication between staff and students	2.74	1
Consistent/fair enforcement of rules	2.69	2
Student receives positive reinforcement from staff	2.68	2
Student bonds with staff	2.62	2
Student's choice to attend Job Corps, not someone else's	2.59	2
Student ability to follow rules/obey authority	2.59	2
Student has emotional difficulties	2.58	2
Student motivation	2.57	2
Student is focused/has specific goals	2.55	2
Center safety	2.55	2
Student history of drug or alcohol use	2.53	2
Comfortable center/dormitory environment	2.52	2
Quality orientation program	2.52	2
Student homesickness	2.49	2
Student maturity level	2.45	2
Center recreational activities	2.43	3
Student has children	2.43	3
Student has strong relationship ties off Center	2.38	3
Student is respectful of self and others	2.37	3
Student was misinformed about center facilities	2.34	3
Dorm/residence cleanliness	2.30	3
Availability of the student's desired trade on site	2.30	3
Student age	2.29	3
Student has an outside support system	2.27	3
Student gang affiliation	2.22	3
Center location	2.10	4
Quality medical services on site	2.08	4
Center maintenance	2.02	4
Cultural diversity on Center	2.00	4
Quality of food on center	1.84	5
Student education level	1.74	5
Student academic ability	1.63	5

Representative quotes from the first-round, open-ended survey are added below to help expand on the top-rated ideas. Participants did not provide in-depth responses to each item they listed; rather, they elaborated on items they felt needed clarification or further comment.

CARING STAFF

> …Center "culture" which is supportive, caring and respectful by staff for students. [It must be] communicated to each student… they are special and wanted [which] translates into retaining students beyond 90 days. Center staff communicating this type of culture to its students will also communicate this culture to each other… thus model[ing] the nurturing environment in which everybody in it is success oriented. A center environment and work culture attaining these attributes is coached by center director and management team who "walk the walk."

> Develop staff so that they are more responsive to students.

> Sincere and demonstrated staff interest in students.

STUDENT COMMITMENT

> Students who demonstrate commitment by arriving a month or several months after their applications are taken by Admission Counselors usually stay longer than 90 days.

POSITIVE WELCOME/ BONDING BY STAFF AND STUDENTS

> Students need to be made aware of their importance in the success or failure of our new students. Belonging and having a social group is important to youth. Our students need to be trained and actively welcome and include new students. A student who feels accepted and comfortable will remain in our program.

COMMUNICATION

> Center staff are most effective when there is shared intent, mission, and vision. The values of the organization must cross departmental lines and infect vertical and horizontal lines of communication.

ENFORCEMENT OF RULES

> Students exhibit irresponsible behaviors due to lack of instruction, direction, and correction as it relates to being able to cope in society.

Rules and regulations must be consistent with all discipline decisions to show students that we are fair and firm.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT FROM STAFF

Constant positive PR on successful students. Keep new students jacked up that they are going to be successful. Praise them often. Look for the good things about them.

Lay out your rules. Make students believe you are here to make them successful. Make early commitment to them if they commit to the Center. [Students] are part of your Center's success from the day you get them. Tell them so. Make them know they count.

STUDENT'S CHOICE TO ATTEND JOB CORPS, NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S

Occasionally, a student will say they are here only to satisfy their parents, which leads to their not having a plan - or set out to reach the goal of completion.

ABILITY TO FOLLOW RULES

Constantly remind and explain as fully as possible [the] reasons for Center rules. Include students in setting guidelines to operate within the Center.

EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Significant number of students exit the Center prior to 90 days through the discipline system or from an inability to adjust to Center life because of mental health issues – primarily because of manic depressive disorders.

MOTIVATION

This Center has entry-level jobs a $5.50 to $6.00 per hour as custodial service workers, food service workers, dormitory aides, clerks and receptionists, and drivers. Turnover rates are very high and it takes a great deal of time and money to advertise and hire for these positions. Students hired into these positions as student workers at minimum wage and for two to ten hours a week are being given opportunities for investing them in the Center's employment culture and provide much needed services for other student[s] which is efficient and cost-effective for the Center. Hired students and those students who aspire to be hired for these positions are more apt to stay beyond 90 days.

What is the student's exit strategy? Students who come to Job Corps have in their minds something akin to a personal contract with themselves and their significant others which allows for their returning honorably to the status quo of home. How well the center proves up on those unknown contracted conditions will determine whether they will stay. Willingness to take on a new lifestyle and commitment to a vocational trade are most significant in ending their exit strategy. In the first few days, possibly the first 24 hours, while homesickness is still a big factor, they begin putting a list of intolerable conditions together. That list invalidates our program and opens the door to home.

Salesmanship vs. motivation... If the student is sold on the program by a great salesman, buyer's remorse kicks in during homesickness and their list of intolerable conditions validates the contract with others and makes for a soft landing back home. If during the admission process, they are presented with a "this is what Job Corps can do for you" rather than, "Here is what you can do for yourself" picture, the student has not been motivated by realistic goals and expectations. They are unlikely to take ownership in the work and adapt to the changes in their lifestyle.

GOAL-ORIENTED

The program needs to be arranged to allow for immediate meaningful goal attainment to promote students' feeling good about the program early. Goals can be increasingly difficult to maintain motivation.

Students who have clarified life goals and training objectives while they are enrolled in Job Corps will usually stay longer than 90 days.

FEELING SAFE

Center must be a safe environment where students are not fearful for their personal safety. They must believe staff care about student safety and will intervene to prevent assaults and fights. Also, the Center must provide a secure environment for student's personal property and clothing and must ensure personal property can be secured and systems are in place to prevent thefts and maximum effort is made to retrieve stolen property. Fear for personal safety and loss of property will lead to early terminations.

Staff must ensure that all students feel safe on the center... Center staff must be supportive of the Center's ZT policy on violence and drugs.

DRUG USE

…Students entering the Job Corps …experimenting or using the illegal drug marijuana. Most believe very strongly that marijuana is not harmful to their health and well being and do not subscribe the Job Corps ZT policy on illegal drugs… Those students using illegal drugs often fail their follow-up drug screens… and [will be] separated from the Center.

DORM HOUSING/ POSITIVE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Center must provide a suitable living environment in its dormitories which are well-heated and cooled, in good repair, clean, and with adequate bedding and closet facilities. Dormitories must be well managed by staff with assistance of students to ensure a good camaraderie in the dormitory environment and it is safe and living conditions are suitable. Good dorm program will assist in affecting retention past 90 days. Dorms where students are the driving force for keeping the dorms clean and in good repair have evolved good student leadership and those students can help establish a positive culture which has a lot of retention value for all students.

Make every attempt possible to create a bright and welcoming atmosphere to the resident in spite of the age of the building.

BEING AWAY FROM HOME/ BEING HOMESICK

Many students find it very difficult to adapt in a public environment day in and day out, when they are used to being at home and having their own privacy… Students enter the program leaving serious family problems at home and feel an obligation to go back home and help, before they complete their training.

Allow frequent phone calls home…. Work with parents early on to ensure their support in helping students stay in the program.

To counteract homesickness, keep students busy. Get them involved in Center activities.

IMMATURITY

…lack of maturity and readiness…Some students operate with short term satisfaction needs and those are usually younger students. Often, younger students are more concerned with social pleasure needs… rather than … needs such as securing "job skills and GED credentials."

The most important characteristic students must possess to become 90 day plus stayers is a level of maturity which allows them to cope with the pressures and expectations of the Center's living and learning environments... Staff must ensure that the living learning environment of the Center is suitable... In addition, staff must become better versed in the maturational needs of students being served by the Center, especially those students who are demonstrating juvenile irrational behaviors. Staff must be trained who have the gifts/talents for being able to recognize and work effectively with all students regardless of student maturational behaviors. Toxic staff must not be retained. Success of a center in retaining difficult students is with the behavior modification skills its staff possess[es].

Further enhance the maturity level of all students through our current "Social Skills Training" by addressing students as employees during the course of the training day. Increased focus on the students who are less mature...

Recreation

Center must provide many and multiple recreation activities to absorb its students' leisure time from the end of the training day until curfew weekdays and their waking hours on the weekends. Students who cannot provide themselves with structured recreation may engage in parties on or off center where drugs and alcohol may be being used. A good recreation program of a Center will ensure a variety of recreation opportunities exist to help meet the unstructured time needs of students... This recreation will help keep many students out of trouble, thus affecting retention past 90 days.

Being a parent/ Having the responsibility for children

Small children and babies are often a factor for young mothers to depart Center prior to 90 days.

Cleanliness

[Having] a clean, attractive environment [with] lots of personal enhancements.

Clean residential areas that are in good repair.

In vocational trade of choice

Students who arrive on center with an understanding they will be enrolled into a trade of choice within 30 days will stay longer than 90 days. Students should not be departed to the Center and enrolled until a vocational training slot is available to them for which they have acknowledged interest.

Waiting lists and second trades are not conducive to gaining commitment from new students. All attempts should be made to balance trade size and get students into their first choice trade.

Trade openings should be available within the first 30 days after students arrive on Center. Long waiting lists for trade entry is discouraging and facilitate early student separations prior to 90 days. Prior to their arrival, students should be aware as to when they can expect enrollment into a trade position.

AGE (IF <18 YEARS, THEY DO NOT CONTINUE)

16 year-olds are not only at a disadvantage because of maturity, they are also prohibited from taking union and HBI trades! That means that almost one-half of the vocations offered in Job Corps are closed to 16 and 17 year-olds!!

At some point in orientation, students who are younger need to be separated from the others and a different approach should be used with them in terms of setting the expectation and talking to issues that directly relate to younger students. Possibly have separate living quarters for younger students.

PARENTAL/ FAMILY SUPPORT

People with supportive relationships stick with projects longer than those whose parents, siblings, spouses, and friends are demeaning and critical.

CAFÉ/ GOOD FOOD ON SITE

Accommodate students with a menu they can relate to and one that is appealing and nutritious.

LOW EDUCATIONAL ABILITY/ READING OR MATH DIFFICULTIES

Learning styles of students are not always matched with teaching styles available. Even in the Job Corps setting with its small classes, some students with very severe learning disabilities cannot have their needs met with current resources. Students with poor math and reading competencies are more apt to separate from the Center prior to 90 days especially if they are special education students.

The following interesting quotes cannot be incorporated neatly into the item rankings, but are of interest.

Desperation:
Trainees for whom Job Corps is the last or only option for a place to live while learning and growing up, may hang on harder when the going gets tough.

Past success:
Students with some history of successful role performance may be more able to frame the present experiences in a positive light.

Resiliency:
Overcoming an obstacle like chemical dependency or a crummy home life, may bode well for future achievement.

Center/ Staff acts as a team:
Set up effective systems and set standards. Train staff until they have "one mind" on standards. Educate staff to use the systems whereby empowering staff and students to reach the established goals/standards.

Teamwork between staff members reflects the consistency and organizational culture as well as social skills among staff. This is crucial – the quality level of staff members has got to be there.

Strong positive student leaders/ Peer support for incoming students:
Enhance our orientation student leader program. Give them more responsibility in taking a few students under their wing.

Quality of vocational program:
Center must provide quality vocational training. Vocational training is translated into good jobs by students and this is the primary reason they have agreed to come to Job Corps. Students must be convinced the vocational training they are obtaining will lead to good jobs! Schools to Work Programs connected to the trades are a vital link to ensure this belief. Lack of vocational training satisfaction will lead to early terminations.

In the first survey round, Center Directors were asked about what policies the National Office could implement to support centers and staff in their endeavors to increase retention rates. Many Center Directors cited staff training and increasing staff salaries so that quality staff could be recruited and maintained. A brief selection of responses are reported below.

STAFF WAGES

Properly compensate staff to retain/ attract appropriate staff. Many trainees begin at a higher starting wage than most Job Corps staff.

Secure the resources necessary to increase staff salaries across the board. One of our Respect goals is to secure student graduates a livable wage of $8.00 per hour but we are paying many of our staff in the Residential and Support areas much less. Instructional and Counseling Staff must be paid commensurately with their peers in the public system taking into account the 12-month teaching schedule of Job Corps staff.

OUTREACH AND ADMISSIONS

Outreach/Admissions contractors' measures should mirror the Centers'. They need numbers and the centers need retention and performance. If Outreach/Admissions contractors could benefit from retention and positive student performance, it would lessen the revolving door of students in and out.

Admissions Counselors need a better understanding of what it takes to be successful in Job Corps.

Develop a system that will hold Outreach/Admissions counselors more accountable. Also if they aren't meeting their goals, we should look at replacing [them] with another contractor.

INCREASED STAFF TRAINING

Centers must ensure that they have trained staff who feel valued. If they do not (and for too many years, many did not), they cannot possibly help the students. A trained and valued staff receives quality training on a recurring basis, and this must be built into the structure of how Job Corps does business. Right now, we fill our staff's plate way too full with programmatic obligations that frequently leave them frustrated and insecure… Give students more time off so staff can be trained!

National Office can encourage the development of high quality training components throughout Job Corps by making available appropriate funding levels for training staff salaries while insisting on credentials.

Staff training on innovative teaching techniques and motivation activities for staff and students would be helpful.

I recommend that [the] National office consider providing more resources to Centers for the training and support services 16-17 year old students require. Programs can be developed which stress more academics and provide highly structured vocational and recreational programs for these students.

RESOURCES

It appears that we are headed in that direction… the modernization funding is a step in the right direction for better facilities.

Too many reviews. Two problems here: one is time and the other is that under the present requirements, there is not enough resources (money and qualified credible reviewers). Support something more like accreditation process…1,2,3,5 years based on the review! We are becoming stretched and need to put more on the student level. It is also important that we recruit kids who show genuine interest in the opportunity.

Facilities should be improved to provide the best physical atmosphere possible for all of or students.

MISCELLANEOUS

Drug test prior to arrival.

I recommend the National Office consider changing its ZT policies for illegal drug use by students by allowing certain offenses to be changed to level 2 or 3 categories. We lose 30-40% of our enrollment to ZT drug terminations – some prior to the 45 day and others after the 45 day. In my opinion, we are sacrificing unnecessarily too many young people who use illegal drugs (marijuana) from the Job Corps. I believe Center staff should be allowed to work with "using" students in attempts to change their behavior. I support behavior code which discourages use of alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine by students or staff on Center or off Center because of the dangers to their health and lives. However, the reality is that students and staff do use these substances (unwisely). We are wrongfully choosing not to work with our students using marijuana and many will be lost to our program and perhaps even life itself – needlessly. The current Job Corps policy on drug use by students in the Job Corps is not working – in my opinion.

Celebration at different milestones/ timelines for students.

Relocation of Centers which are in bad neighborhoods.

The most helpful change at the Center level would be less demand on our time to report/describe Center activities. Federal Centers are staffed at the absolute minimum and staff need to be directly involved with students to the [greatest] extent possible.

Increase age entry level into Job Corps… Allow students to spend a week on Center before officially signing in… do follow up of screeners employing criteria set forth by National Job Corps… Re-evaluate the distance a student's home is from his/her assigned Center.

Orientation Managers

Orientation managers received a similar first round survey except the final questions focused on what could be done during orientation to influence students' retention. In addition, the managers were asked "Do you believe that student characteristics revealed during orientation allow you or your staff to predict (with a reasonable degree of accuracy) whether a student will drop out of the program or be terminated within the first 3 months of his/her stay?" An overwhelming number (84%) felt they could immediately identify students who would fail in the first three months of the program. The format of the second survey was identical to the center director survey. The content can be reviewed by seeing the results offered in Table 4.

Survey Results

First-round surveys were returned by 50 (83%) of the 60 Orientation Managers surveyed. Again, Treasure Island was excluded from analysis. Of the 29 centers from the top quartile (high retention), 27 (93%) returned surveys while 24 (80%) of 30 sites in the low quartile (low retention) returned surveys.

Second-round surveys were completed by 50 (80%) of the 60 Center Directors surveyed. There were no differences in participation between sites with high and low retention rates. Of the 30 centers from the top quartile, 24 (80%) returned surveys while 26 (87%) of 30 sites in the low quartile returned surveys. The 40 top items from the Round I survey are listed in Table 4 according to their mean ratings from Round II. The marginal homogeneity test resulted in five separate rankings for the 40 items.

Table 4. Orientation Manager survey items listed by rank order.

Item	Mean Score	Rank
Staff members have positive attitude	2.84	1
Staff are supportive	2.80	1
Staff demonstrates a caring attitude	2.78	1
Quality student/staff interactions	2.78	1
Staff helps meet student needs	2.78	1
Quality orientation program	2.76	1
Student has positive attitude	2.72	1
Student feels accepted/welcomed by other students and staff	2.68	1
Student motivation	2.66	1
Student ability to follow rules/obey authority	2.66	1
Consistent/fair enforcement of rules	2.64	2
Student exhibits a negative attitude	2.64	2
Student emotional stability	2.64	2
Comfortable center/dormitory environment	2.60	2
Student willingness to change	2.58	2
Student's choice to attend Job Corps, not someone else's	2.58	2
Student history of drug or alcohol use	2.54	2
Student is focused/has specific goals	2.49	2
Center safety	2.48	2
Student mental health issues	2.46	2
Center rules and regulations	2.46	2
Student has realistic expectations of Job Corps	2.42	2
Availability of the student's desired trade on site	2.42	2
Center recreational activities	2.38	3
Student age	2.38	3
Student homesickness	2.37	3
Student is respectful of self and others	2.37	3
Short wait to be placed in trade of choice	2.34	3
Student has children	2.28	3
Student was misinformed about center facilities	2.28	3
Student attention span	2.27	3
Student has an outside support system	2.24	3
Student confidence	2.12	4
Student self esteem	2.10	4
Student academic ability	2.02	4
Center cleanliness	2.00	4
Student acceptance of different cultures	1.98	5
Student is outgoing or shy	1.84	5
Center location	1.82	5
Quality of food on center	1.78	5

Representative quotes from the first-round, open-ended survey are added below to help expand on the top-rated ideas.

STAFF ARE SUPPORTIVE

> The more we can connect students to individual staff for support and mentoring, the easier the student's transition, [and] the more likely they will remain in the program.
>
> Often students decide to leave because they feel that 'no one cares about them or what happens to them. This can happen when staff members neglect to address whether or not a student needs keys, looks a little depressed, doesn't feel well, etc. It is the little things staff pays attention to that make the student want to stay. [If] students are experiencing conflict with individual students and are upset, but no one asks them what is wrong… they feel alone.
>
> Some students are leaving home for the first time. Sometimes we worry too much about keeping them in-line and getting their paper work finished, that we don't take time to see how they're feeling.
>
> Help the student realize that arriving on center shows their leadership qualities, because it takes a leader to make a better future for themselves.

STAFF DEMONSTRATES CARING ATTITUDE

> Personal investment (caring attitude) of staff seems to be important to students. Student to staff ratio also plays an important part in this. Keeping environmental stress low and staff and services consistent is important to the success of the students.
>
> Special treatment in orientation such as special lunch…snacks, and special trips all help in making new students feel comfortable, at home, and welcomed. Constant counseling about the positive achievements that can be accomplished here, so they can be reassured their choice in coming to Job Corps was a good one.

STUDENT HAS POSITIVE ATTITUDE

> You cannot judge our new students too quickly. Adjusting to the center is a difficult experience and people react to stress in many different ways. All staff needs to be trained to keep an open mind and realize our students grow and develop daily. We can't hold grudges or make firm decisions.
>
> If students see how important Job Corps is to their future then they will overlook any negative aspects that go on around the Center. In orientation I explain all of the perks that they will benefit from (i.e. money, bonuses, GED, job training, etc.) Then they see Job Corps as more of a second chance instead of what they deem as "prison like."

STUDENT FEELS ACCEPTED/WELCOMED BY OTHER STUDENTS AND STAFF

A student welcoming committee that makes the new student feel welcomed… is very important.

STUDENT MOTIVATION

If a student comes in without any goals in mind at all, and states in orientation, "I don't know why I'm here-someone made me join the program," it is difficult to motivate that student to see beyond the first couple of weeks. These students have a very difficult time adjusting and are not looking to the future they can create for themselves. Instead, they dread every day and reject the program from the start. If a new student during orientation, cooperates, participates, shows that in fact he/she wants to take advantage of the program, you can tell whether a student will be long or not in the program.

Ask the students to remember what brought them here and to not let go of that reason.

STUDENT ABILITY TO FOLLOW RULES/ OBEY AUTHORITY

The skills that most directly impact the success of a student are dealing with conflict, dealing with change, creating a positive environment, and goal setting. If students refuse to follow simple requests and rules within their first week of being in the program, how are they going to manage following instructions in the trades, dorms, and education where it is even more imperative that they follow rules of safety and need to behave appropriately.

Students with discipline or behavior problems can be counseled by orientation specialists who then can be aided by Center Standards Officers, counselors and the Security Supervisor.

CONSISTENT/FAIR ENFORCEMENT OF RULES

Consistency of staff has a large effect on retention. Students witness different rules being enforced by different staff, and students do not consistently receive the same consequences for similar acts.

Address negative behavior as it occurs.

ISSUES WITH DORM LIFE/ ROOMMATE

Some students have a hard time with having a roommate for the first time, and adjusting to moving away from home.

More privacy in dorm (develop a quiet area).

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Impress upon the student that this is a safe haven and that the center is a cross-section of the real world.

MENTAL HEALTH

… Students that enter the program with mental health problems are not able to grasp the information or instructions due to some of them having to be highly medicated to attend class.

…. More and more students are admitted with these requirements (psychotropic medications). Although they may stay, the struggle behaviorally is difficult for them and the center.

CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY IN EXPECTATIONS

Students come to Job Corps unsure of what to expect. During orientation certain expectations are laid out for these students and everything is said to be important… Our staff lead by example – if we are giving negative examples, how can we expect our students to remain their first 90 days? We just confuse them more.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Don't force a student to take a trade that they don't like. Allow a student who can't get the trade of choice to reenter when the trade is available.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Have organized activities that they can all participate in as a group - tournaments against or with previous groups, arts and crafts group projects, etc.

By being in a remote location, we must be more innovative when planning activities for our students to attend.

Plan more activities off center and more culturally oriented.

AGE

Have centers designated for 16 and 17 year olds – do not let them mix with older populations.

Pay more attention to younger students – peer mentoring can be effective.

[The younger students] are not at a maturity level to handle or discipline themselves to complete the program.

Students who are 16 & 17 years old tend to get terminated easier from the program than those over age… Students of those ages (16 & 17) are starting to experience testing things around them (i.e. relationships, drugs, changing schools). They are very insecure and have no clue of their future. They have problems with rules and have a hard time dealing with anger.

It seems 16 & 17 year olds have a harder time adapting to center rules. It also discourages them when they are told that they can't be placed in a job until they are 18 years old.

I believe age is a major player in retention on center. It is very difficult to keep a 16-year old motivated for a year in a trade such as Painting or Business Clerical when what they want to do is Electrical Wiring, Plumbing, or Cement.

FAR FROM HOME/ HOMESICK

Students usually look forward to going home and are impatient about the 30 day probationary period.

Allowing students to make contact often with their family during the first week sometimes combats homesickness.

RESPECT (FOR SELF/OTHERS/CENTER)

All students must be trained to respect themselves… and their peers and staff. Respect by itself is enough to bring on change.

When students disrespect each other in my presence, it is addressed immediately – there is no tolerance for students being rude to one another, and this is understood from day one.

VOCATIONAL WAIT

Waiting lists and second trades are not conducive to gaining commitment from new students. All attempts should be made to balance trade size and get students into their first choice trade. Students need to be made aware of their importance in the success or failure of out new students.

Authorized capacity of students is higher than the space allocations in the vocations – students become frustrated and want to go home, they are not used to waiting or considering a second choice.

CHILDREN (OTHER RESPONSIBILITY AT HOME)

Females with children… without childcare and parenting classes… they are doomed.

… Students with children, particularly non-residential students, tend to have worries about providing primary financial support and paternal care obligations that take priority over more long term educational goals.

Child care is the principle element with student separation due to child care provider not being able to fulfill their commitment as promised, thus forcing student to drop program to care for the child.

Our program has case managers (counselors and resource specialists) who spend half of their time identifying resources to meet the personal needs of single parent families to keep them in training.

EXPECTATIONS PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

Most students leave if their admission counselors do not fill them in on what is expected of them as far as dorm life, or education…(or) if they feel the program is not what they expected.

Taking students on tour of the town in which the Job Corps is located so they can be aware of where they are.

ABILITY TO MIX WITH DIFFERENT CULTURES

… [Provide] diversity and multicultural training early on.

The following interesting quotes may not have made it into the item rankings, but were provided by Orientation Managers.

Facility/ Equipment:

Students that have a problem being friendly will be helped by the student leaders on center, student mentors, dorm officers, recreation aides. Don't let students isolate themselves from others.

Belonging and having a social group is important to youth. A student who feels accepted and comfortable will remain in our program.

Peer mentoring/ Leadership/ Support groups:
Student oriented leadership which focuses on problem solving and conflict resolution.

Incentives/ Awards:
Center incentives are vital in the protection against student drop out/separation. I consider them most influential in assuring a student will continue in the program beyond the 90th day.

Orientation Managers were asked what changes could be made to Orientation to enhance the favorable student characteristics and change the negative ones. Their responses follow.

Early assessment and support to meet needs.

Let the student know that responsibility for their success in Job Corps and in life is mainly theirs, but the staff on center is responsible for doing everything in their power to stop them from not succeeding in the Job Corps program.

Promote employability from the very beginning and relate employability to education.

In depth assessment of student needs with individual attention to meeting those needs and preparing the student for dealing with center environment and expectations.

When Orientation Managers were asked what changes could be made to orientation to minimize factors contributing to dropout and to maximize those which increase retention, they responded with the following:

Emphasize Zero Tolerance Policy.

More teambuilding activities.

Group activities to build trust, communication, support network.

Clearly explain to new students all activities and resources that they can take advantage of.

Make sure that those in orientation realize being disciplined is very important to their success in Job Corps.

Early identification of those students who want to go home.

Shorten orientation – get them moving quicker.

95% of student info is received four days before entry. Not able to contact. Don't allow any entry that is not pre-screened 10 days prior to entry to give last minute drop outs time … to re-evaluate commitment.

Random drug testing as a deterrent.

Place emphasis on the advanced training opportunities. Begin to identify areas of interest and "track" students so they will be ready to enter the advanced programs.

There should be a graduation ceremony after completion of orientation. All of the staff should come and spend time talking to students and addressing needs.

If we had trades better suited to females, they would be happier.

Have Wellness Center understand [the students'] fears when it comes receiving physicals and shots.

I'm positive that medical and education testing done pre-arrival would help! The first few days should be devoted to interactive education of [the students] and the program. At present my class time is lecture! Telling them things and then sending them to health services and education for testing! Not much of a welcome. If pre-arrival tests could be done I could do a more meaningful orientation in half the time, making them part of things faster while being better prepared.

Give students alarm clocks during orientation.

FLEXIBILITY - that's the general keyword to help retention.

Mental Health Consultants

Regional Mental Health Consultants were given one open-ended survey asking what student characteristics and center characteristics they felt contributed to student success in Job Corps. Mental Health Consultants were targeted because of their unique experiences dealing with psychosocial issues. Because of the small sample size (n=8), all items will be presented in Table 5 (student characteristics) and Table 6 (center characteristics). Items are listed according to the number of times an idea was reported. Following the tables are pertinent quotes from Mental Health Consultants which will provide greater detail of the item meanings.

(Round I surveys were designed to be an open-ended means to explore the most important student and center characteristics affecting student retention in the past 90 days. The survey (with spaces allowed for written answers omitted) is included below. Participants were aware that they "may be directly, but anonymously, quoted in the report.")

Round I Survey

1A. **Please list student characteristics (states or traits) that you believe contribute to, or are protective against, early (first 90 days) program dropout.**
List as many as you like as part of your personal brainstorming process. Then, circle the 5 that you believe most determine whether the student will dropout versus continue in the program. Finally, from among the five circled, place a star next to the 2 most critical characteristics.

1B. If you believe that any of your top five choices need further explanation please use this space to define or elaborate.

2A. **Please list center characteristics (programmatic, structural, or staff related) that you believe contribute to, or are protective against, early (first 90 days) program dropout.**
Again, list as many as you like as part of your personal brainstorming process. Then, circle the 5 that you believe most determine whether the student will dropout versus continue in the program. Finally, from among the five circled, place a star next to the 2 most critical characteristics.

2B. If you believe that any of your top five choices need further explanation please use this space to define or elaborate.

3. (Optional, but appreciated)

3A. **Look at the five characteristics you have chosen regarding the student. Describe what the program might be able to do to enhance any of the favorable characteristics - or extinguish or rechannel any of the negative characteristics.**

3B. **Look at the five characteristics you have chosen regarding the center. Describe what the program might be able to do to enhance any of the favorable characteristics or extinguish or rechannel any of the negative characteristics.**

Table 5. Mental Health Consultant survey items regarding student characteristics listed by rank order.

Item	Ran
History of drug/ Alcohol use	1
Age <18	2
History of a learning disability	3
Mental health conditions (present or past)	3
Students choice to come to Job Corps, not just running from problems	4
No legal history/ Delinquent behavior	4
Immaturity	4
Low educational ability/ Reading or math difficulties	4
Family responsibility (child, sick parent, etc.)	4
Low self esteem	5
Acting out, aggressive, antisocial behavior	5
Poor school performance	5
History of ADHD	5
Low IQ/ Mental retardation	5
High impulsivity/ Poor anger management	5
Paranoid/ suspicious personality, neuroticism	5
Poor idea of job choice/ Vocational goal	6
Low frustration tolerance	6
Unhealthy interpersonal skills	6
Student has inadequate role models	6
Coping skills	6
Lack of vision	6
Lack of initiative	6
Low conscientiousness	6
Low agreeableness	6
Male gender	6
History of Special Education classes	6
Poor assertive skills	6
Student from urban vs. rural communities	6
Stable work history	6
Violence/ Gang involvement	6
Ability to socialize; participate in new groups	6
Self-management skills	6
Unresolved emotional conflicts	6
Vocational wait	6
Noncompliance with medicines	6
In foster care	6
Unrealistic expectations	6
Difficulty bonding	6
Social Skills	6
History of success	6
Unstable medical problems	6
Being extruded from social systems in home community	6

STUDENT IS LESS THAN 18 YEARS OF AGE

"Young age" has been found in many studies to correlate with low program completion. Some are due to immaturity and homesickness, some due to a lack of "real life" experiences and uncorroborated expectations of Job Corps as well as the student's own potentials... Some due to... being easily influenced by others (all of these tendencies can be influenced by the right programs).

Provide early and intensive mentoring (staff and student) for 16 and 17 year-olds.

Job Corps needs to review its policy of letting 16 & 17 year olds in. They (the majority) are just too immature.

... Young student... Engage student with strong, caring, "mentor" who can help the student feel comfortable in the program... Modify unrealistic expectations and goals, while finding desirable opportunities and interests at the Job Corps Center.

HISTORY OF A LEARNING DISABILITY

Increase number of certified Special Ed teachers at each Center.

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS (PRESENT OR PAST)

Increase time from hospitalizations to Job Corps from 6 to 9 months and require concrete evidence of prosocial adjustment to community in the application.

Have Admissions Counselor investigate more thoroughly psychiatric history... Centers could establish abuse (sexual, physical) groups for all students initially. Health Service workers report that 85-100% of girls entering Job Corps have been abused. 30% of males have been abused. Assessment and management plans by the CMHC should be done and implemented within 7 days.

STUDENTS CHOICE TO COME TO JOB CORPS, NOT JUST RUNNING FROM PROBLEMS

Admissions Counselor needs to determine commitment to Job Corps and not the applicants need to avoid the court's alternative.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY (CHILD, SICK PARENT, ETC.)

Define potential "problems at home" when student first applies for admission and help that student arrange for adequate care at home so he/she can feel free to devote self to training program.

ACTING OUT, AGGRESSIVE, ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

As part of Orientation, present methods to cope with conflict or feelings in an adaptive way and describe the negative aspects and consequences of acting out.

HISTORY OF ADHD

Require assessment of ADHD and utilize medications for behavioral management.

UNHEALTHY INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Students lack basic social skills that jeopardize their retention in the program.

STUDENT HAS INADEQUATE ROLE MODELS

Students often emulate unhealthy role models with which they are familiar.

COPING SKILLS

Students need to be equipped with the right tools if they are to overcome the obstacles that are all around them. Often times, students practice unhealthy coping strategies such as the use of alcohol and other drugs.

LACK OF VISION

Students may have some notion of the trade they would like to learn. They may also verbalize a desire to be "successful." However, if they have no specific goal in mind, it is very difficult for them to achieve success.

LACK OF INITIATIVE

Achieving educational, career, and personal goals requires that a student remain motivated. The student must initiate and sustain drive that will enable him/her to continue striving, even when faced with significant obstacles.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Admission Counselors should describe the program in a realistic fashion and elaborate on some of the more stressful aspects of the program.

Table 6. Mental Health Consultant survey items regarding center characteristics listed by rank order.

Item	Rank
Strong orientation program	1
Clear behavioral expectations	2
Early student engagement in planning for goals	2
Active personal mentoring program offered to each studen	2
Staff understands/ Connects with studen	2
Center mismanagement (chaos)	2
Staff who project negative attitude toward students	2
Weak educational and vocational programs	2
Vocational wai	2
Staff can understand and relate to adolescents' stressors	2
Misled by admissions counselors	2
Staff united with clear vision	2
Open door policy with management/staff	2
CD supports AODA, Mental health and Medical	2
Unhappy and frustrated employees	2
Management teams which promotes healthy communication	2
Active and attractive recreational program	3
Well-organized and maintained dormitory facilities	3
Strong program to ensure personal safety of students	3
Accurate expectations about Cen er and program during recruitmen	3
Strong counseling and advising program	3
Active social program, attractive for even shy students	3
Cultural diversit	3
Jailhouse mentalit	3
High variability of student age range on Center	3
Inability to clearly communicate value of training to students	3
Large Center	3
Nonresponsive staff	3
AC's not investigating applicant well enough	3
High expectations of students	3
Innovative teaching strategies	3
All center staff have integrity in performing their duties	3
Good leadership (CD)	3

STRONG ORIENTATION PROGRAM

"Strong Orientation Program" can help student develop realistic expectations for what they can learn at the Center and how to make use of various Center programs and staff. This helps engage student early in stay and reduces likelihood of homesickness, substance abuse, etc.

CLEAR BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

"Clear defined expectation" when followed, can help immature and impulsive students learn to control themselves if done in a reasonable fashion that is also "fair." If said expectations include some rewards, for good behavior, it can also help improve student self esteem and peer norms.

EARLY STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN PLANNING FOR GOALS

"Early engagement in planning vocational goals"... Early one-on-one efforts to help each student begin to decide what they might want to do [and] is also realistic for that student at that center, is crucial. The staff member helping with the task must be caring and accepting of that student to help with the engagement process.

"Early engagement in planning goals" can help identify students who may have impulsive or anger management problems, or low self esteem before they get into trouble or drop put. By making such an identification at the beginning to define vocational goals, the student would be more willing to accept help for correcting undesirable behaviors in order to succeed at vocational training.

STAFF CAN UNDERSTAND AND RELATE TO ADOLESCENTS' STRESSORS

Staff [is] not understanding the level of stress [the] adolescent is going through (e.g. homesickness)... More training for staff [is needed] on this issue.

STAFF UNITED WITH CLEAR VISION

With a shared vision, Center staff would ideally work together as a team. Recognition is given to the fact that no one department supercedes the other in value. Effort is made to ensure that each staff member feels valued, respected, and appreciated.

Center Administration would benefit from training and consultation services. Center staff across departments should contribute to the development of the Center's mission or vision. Subsequently, all staff need to perform their duties in accordance with the Center's shared vision or mission. Training and systems consultation would assist the centers in: a) improving trust relationships with and among staff; b) improving communication within and between departments; c) facilitating a work environment where staff is encouraged to develop creative ways of resolving problems; d) promoting continuous quality improvements in all departments by valuing the individual skills of each staff person and encouraging them to engage in learning processes that continue to refine those skills.

UNHAPPY AND FRUSTRATED EMPLOYEES

Reward top management so there is incentive to stay –this should be helped by the new review program.

Review and remedy staff retention problems. With 30+% annual turnover in residential living it is hard to create the type of atmosphere that will attract students – happy staff lead to happy students.

OPEN HEALTHY SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION/ MANAGEMENT TEAM

Centers could benefit from consultants who can do team building and help develop consistent communication between disciplines on Center.

Management team – communication within and across all levels of the organization

STRONG COUNSELING AND ADVISING PROGRAM

Successful Centers have a strong counseling department that works closely with the CMHC to develop support groups and processes. Troubled students are identified quickly and referred to the appropriate support service. The zero tolerance program is strictly practiced.

One staff and one student needs to be available for student during the first 45 days student is on Center.

Various support groups can be established by the CMHC, counselors, etc. that focus on specific common issues. Areas that come to mind include support groups around entry and adjustment to the Center for new students. These groups could be peer led by advanced students. Groups focusing on anger management, anxiety management, physical/sexual abuse, goal-setting, etc. can be offered to help students gain mastery over problem areas in their lives. These would obviously not be therapy groups, but certainly would be therapeutic.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Strong program of racial and ethnic diversity, so that student can identify with other students with similar backgrounds.

JAILHOUSE MENTALITY

Get away from prison or military models… think more in terms of a school.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

> The majority of students entering the program have grown up in an atmosphere where very little is expected of them. Consequently many of the students never learn to rise above a minimum level of behavioral as well as academic functioning. If the Center staff sincerely buys into the belief that the students are capable of more and are able to transmit this belief, heightened self-efficacy amongst the students will occur.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

> Teaching techniques geared towards assisting students with learning difficulties will enhance student retention.

ALL CENTER STAFF HAVE INTEGRITY IN PERFORMING THEIR DUTIES

> Center management can provide guidance and role modeling for the students by performing duties in an honest, respectable, and responsible manner. A vital aspect of each staff member's responsibility would be to treat all students in a fair and consistent manner.

Mental Health Consultants also were asked what the Job Corps "program could do to enhance positive student characteristics and extinguish or rechannel negative characteristics?" Their responses follow.

> Centers can provide effective AODA support that is interwoven into all programs on Center, not simply isolated in health services for the troubled student.

> I think most unimpaired folk should be able to complete the program without a lot of specialized supports beyond those that are developmentally appropriate and necessary.

> Introduce small group education activities in recognizing and dealing with upset, anger, and impulsive behaviors (student's own and others) in a way which is both "fun" and also teaches assertive skills, delayed gratification, and peer support.

Section IV – Site Observation

In addition to conducting focus groups during center visits, we spent time with staff and students informally in dining halls, dormitories and recreation centers. We also observed the orientation process, staff meetings, and vocational training. These experiences provided us the opportunity to talk to students and staff alone and in small groups to further understand how they view success or failure at Job Corps. The staff and students we talked to and observed were aware of our purpose at their Job Corps site. To preserve the anonymity of the individuals we spoke to, we have changed names and work titles.

The themes that emerge from these conversations and observations are cursory, but they support and expand upon our quantitative data and focus group findings. We were surprised by the willingness of students and staff to share their ideas. In this section we will share their messages through direct quotes, vignettes, and general insights that resonated with the research team.

Conversations usually focused on why students had come to Job Corps, what the experience was like for them, what they expected to get out of Job Corps, and what would result in a successful or an unsuccessful Job Corps experience. Students and staff felt that taking care of students' emotional needs was one of the most important areas to be addressed if youth were expected to be successful in the educational/training component of the program.

Students' Views: Who Comes to Job Corps?

From the students' perspective, they come to Job Corps not just to benefit from the training aspects of the program, but to receive much needed support that is missing from their home environments. Elaina, a 17 year-old, young appearing, Latina adolescent describes two of her roommates:

> Angel is here because she doesn't have a family. Sofi had a choice of two years in jail or two years in Job Corps. She says that Job Corps is better than juvenile detention; but, still a lot like jail.

Similarly, Marie (an African-American adolescent) reported that she came to "get away from [her] Mom," and "work on [her] anger."

We met Jason in a recreation center late at night where he was drawing. Jason told us that he had come to Job Corps to get his act together. He failed out of school because he was depressed and had too much "anger in my head." He saw Job Corps as a place to finish his education and prove that he could accomplish something. To escape from stress, he drew. For him, the recreation center and the art teacher were his refuge and support. This protected space cleared his mind enough that he was able to do his work during the day. Jason showed us a series of pictures that he reported "tell how I feel." His portfolio chronicled his changing moods and experience at Job Corps. He acknowledged that the early pictures depicted a young man in great turmoil, while the more recent ones were calmer.

Both Job Corps students and their peers were aware that emotional "work" is one of the main reasons that many students have entered Job Corps. Boarding, socializing, and working with adolescents who report non-work reasons as their main impetus for attending Job Corps may have group effects on success that need to be understood through future research. For example, do Job Corps students spend a large amount of their time taking care of each other? Does the emotional work that many students are trying to undertake cause more or less turmoil to other students? In Job Corps sites where there are comprehensive services to address the emotional work, do all students seem to benefit from the environment?

Staffs' Views: Who Comes to Job Corps?

Many faculty are aware that much of what occurs at Job Corps involves working out some of the challenges these youth have faced in the past. We spoke to two vocational instructors after they prompted a group of students back to work from an extended "5-minute break" by asking them, "If this was a real job, do you know how much money you've lost?" Both instructors were middle-aged, white men who had worked in their field of expertise before becoming Job Corps instructors. Both expressed great pride in their decision to become Job Corps Instructors. When the instructors were asked to describe Job Corps students, they first responded quite cynically stating that only a minority would succeed in the program because the others were somehow deficient.

Despite their initial harsh assessment about who comes to Job Corps, they clearly had pride about their role in turning things around for their students. They talked directly and indirectly about the need to parent youth when they entered Job Corps. When asked if many of

their students had a difficult time growing up, they both agreed that the students have a hard life. Instructor A stated, "What are you gonna do about this now?" Instructor B added, "These kids have a hard life and talk about it, and you have to go and switch back and forth between the past and the future." Both felt it was important to share their personal stories, including hardships and successes, with their students.

This encounter encapsulates many of the mixed feelings that staff have as well as the mixed messages that students may receive. These instructors expressed their caring in a tough-love style that appropriately emphasized employability. They recognized the barriers that past hardships had on their students, acknowledging that the past always comes up when they try to promote the future. Instructors state, "What can we do about it," but they take the risks to share their personal stories with students, including hardships and what gave them the strength to overcome those hard times. These positive caring messages come from instructors who freely tell a visitor that they don't expect the great majority of their students to make it because they somehow are ill-equipped. One wonders whether these mixed feelings and expectations are directly or indirectly communicated to students. Further, one is left wondering whether such powerful mixed messages are even more harmful when they come from caring and committed instructors.

This vignette was chosen to convey a consistent theme among staff. The visitors consistently met involved, warm individuals who worked at Job Corps because they wanted to make a real difference in the lives of their students. Yet, they were frustrated, and worried about their ability to affect lives. They talked about burnout, cynicism, hope, and lost hope. They often talked about "other" staff who had given up and were just collecting a paycheck. When asked, they generally responded very favorably to the possibility of receiving staff development training designed to enhance their effectiveness with youth.

Both students and staff clearly see that past difficulties permeate the present and that dual agendas of emotional healing and job training are necessary for success. Sharing past experiences, asking students to focus on the present, and injecting home experiences into Job Corps (e.g, bring-your-pet-to-work day) were some of the ways that staff worked to parent, heal, and care for Job Corps youth.

Who Makes a Difference at Job Corps?

When staff are asked who among them has the most important role on center, they generally respond either the residential advisors because "they spend the most time with the students and do the most counseling," or the teachers/vocational instructors because "they give the students what they are here for." Most centers have a staff member who is seen as particularly important because of the extraordinary kind of support they somehow give the students. On one center it is "Mom-Mom." "Mom-mom" is one of the women who works in the cafeteria. As she serves meals, she learns everyone's name and checks in on their lives. Between preparing and serving meals, students can stop in and talk to her "or get a hug."

At another center, the person who is said to know the most about the students is the maintenance man. He is fairly young, and the students relate to him. Other staff noted two things about him that may have positioned him to be such a force on center. First, he always had a word of encouragement. Second, he was everywhere. His responsibilities made him have to travel the entire campus on a daily basis. Students would speak honestly and comfortably in front of him. Therefore, he really knew what was happening on center better than anybody did, and this positioned him to give excellent guidance. The take home lesson seems to be that all staff are potential counselors on a Job Corps Center. In fact, when discussing with students in focus groups what can help influence their success at Job Corps, one male student stated, "Anybody can be important… It doesn't matter if you're a janitor, police officer, security guard. It doesn't matter."

The Challenge of Orientation

A recurrent theme that students discuss is the anxiety and fear that comes with orientation. The young people talk about being in a new place being with different people than their home friends and sharing their personal space with them. They speak of feeling welcomed one minute and inundated with rules the next. They worry about the testing and how the tests will determine how soon they will be able to get their GED.

Some students talk about it being particularly hard for women who "arrive on the Meat Bus." As they are given a tour of the campus, uncertain of their new environment, males are clearly checking them out and letting others know precisely what they are doing. One evening, shortly before lights out, one of us was waiting at the snack stand for a pizza to be microwaved.

A 20-year-old white woman approached him. After she clarified that he was indeed one of the national doctors from Job Corps, she wanted to know what he was going to do about making Job Corps a better place. Specifically, she wanted to know what he was going to do about having female Job Corps candidates receive complete physical exams by male doctors on their first day of arrival. This young woman proceeded to say she, like many other female Job Corps enrollees, had been raped in the past. She explained that it was traumatic for her to be given a pelvic exam on her first day of arrival by a man she had never met.

Upon reviewing PRH standards, if the clinician suspects that a pelvic examination may be traumatic to the student, it can be delayed until the student has received counseling. On some sites, this issue seemed to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. On other sites, people expressed with great pride the efficiency with which they were able to combine the cursory and full physical within the first couple of days of orientation. This example demonstrates how strict adherence to institutional goals such as efficiency can ultimately alienate and traumatize the vulnerable youth that Job Corps aims to benefit.

Who leaves Job Corps and what impact does that have on "the survivors"?

Though some students' reasons for leaving are a mismatch between expectations and the reality of the Job Corps program, others felt that the termination process in some way was rigged. (When the visits for this report were conducted the term for separation was "termination," therefore it will be used for this portion of the report.)

Those who left for unfulfilled expectations were students similar to Marie. Marie, in addition to wanting to work on her anger, wanted to be a cosmetologist. A recruiter told her that there was cosmetology on the center, but that was a "lie." She added, "You have to do all this work before you can go to school in cosmetology." She already signed termination papers, but people were trying to get her to stay.

Other students believed that there were termination quotas. They believed there were times when staff needed to get rid of students to clear the way for new ones, and therefore targeted certain types of students for failure. On one site, students referred to this phenomenon as "Spring Cleaning."

In a related matter, students sometimes tried to instigate another student's termination. In one complex incident, one boy accused another of stealing. In retribution, the accused boy tried

to have his accuser terminated by pulling down his boxers while he slept and demonstrating to the Resident Advisor that the accuser was "perverted." Each believed they might get the other terminated. Finally, others created rumors about this incident to provoke a fight and get someone terminated. We do not know how common these beliefs are or how often students try to set up a termination. It is clear that students in Job Corps have many strong feelings about the fairness of the process and the loss that comes from this process.

Elaina sleeps in the top bunk of her dorm room. The wall near her bed is covered with Christmas decorations. She explains that the Christmas decorations were supposed to be taken down, but because she made the tinsel into a heart, it was all right to keep it up. On her heart there were seven or eight dried roses. She was asked if it had recently been her birthday. She responded, "No, every time someone leaves they give you a rose. Those are from my friends who were terminated." She had, in effect, a memorial for her terminated friends.

It became clear that sadness and loss occurred among Job Corps "survivors." It is not surprising that students who come from an unstable environment are focused on potential instability, rather than stability and the job-at-hand. Possibly, students focus on terminations because from their perspective it seems to be one aspect of Job Corps that is consistent with the unforgiving nature of their pasts. We often explored the perception that the terminations were rigged or virtually random with students. Without giving any specific examples, he would offer the possibility that the students might have heard only one side of the situation that led to disciplinary terminations. Students understood the terminations related to zero tolerance, but they otherwise tended to perceive that terminations somehow represented staff not caring or "giving up" on a student.

Whether terminations are helpful or hurtful for the students remaining in Job Corps is an area that warrants further exploration. Also, the program needs to explore how to both protect the privacy of separated students and help the survivors "process" why people get terminated. It would seem that the perceived random nature of termination makes the "survivors" feel unduly vulnerable during a life transition where stability and security are essential.

Surviving and Succeeding at Job Corps

We asked a group of young women, "What is the hardest part about being in Job Corps?" One of the first things they mention is that there is "no place to cry." As they speak they point to

the dorm rooms whose walls do not go to the ceiling so noise can easily be heard in adjacent rooms. When we completed a focus group during which the subject of stress came up, a 21-year-old Caucasian man followed us out to try to talk privately. His main concern was how he could create a space to have his own feelings. He said that this was his last chance. His family had abandoned him and he wanted to succeed in Job Corps, but if he didn't have some space to think, he was going to leave.

One of the counselors who is a middle-aged, white man who survived an alcoholic family also confirms this need for space in the context of students' need for healing. As he points to a list of incoming students that he will meet this week, he reads the short and significant mental health problems that affects each youth: "sleeping difficulty, depression, suicide attempt, clean for 12 weeks, stopped Welbutrin." While clearly saddened by the mental health issues of his student-patients, he also describes what he believes works to help youth in need. He has chosen to share his own experience of growing up in a dysfunctional family. He speaks of the importance of having an open-door policy to allow students the time and space to be alone so they can feel and cry.

> Some depressed kids could barely move out of bed [to] go to work. Then instructors are often yelling at them and making the kids feel terrible. They end up back here crying and feeling hurt all over again.

This same counselor summarized with a vignette how he sees one of the most meaningful and salient ways he helps students. He told of a gangly disorganized young man who was "never going to make it." At one point, the boy ended up crying in the counselor's office because he needed a necktie for his job, and he didn't own any. The next day, the counselor brought him five ties (one for each day of the week). The young man asked, "For me? These are for me?" The counselor hadn't expected this student who seemed certain to fail to be so grateful. About two years later, the counselor received a call from the student. He was working as a manager at a Wendy's and attending a community college. He summarized his story by saying, "Job Corps plants a seed of caring, of compassion, of hope…and we know that in five or ten years those seeds may be important. Not now necessarily…"

One of us was walking on a large center with the Deputy Center Director. A young man ran up and showed us an example of electrical wiring that he had soldered. The administrator beamed with pride and said, "That's fine work, which is what I expect from you." The student

responded, "Sooner or later I was bound to do something right in my life." The student walked away clearly moved by his own words. The Deputy Director said, "They just need confidence, they need to know they can do it if they put their mind to it, and they need to know we're behind them."

While the mission of Job Corps is ultimately vocational or academic achievement, students come to Job Corps in need of basic compassion, caring, and parenting. Calling staff members "Mom" or "Pop," getting hassled in a caring way ("If you were working, do you know how much money you'd have lost."), hanging out with staffs' pets, mourning the loss of terminated friends, finding a place to cry, or getting a few neckties, these are all ways that students at Job Corps connect and try to find success.

Conclusions

The qualitative research presented in this chapter is useful in describing the unmeasured factors that influence whether someone will stay in the program. With relatively few exceptions the topics generated by surveys and group techniques were different from the characteristics available for quantitative analysis. High ranking qualitative items that were available in the quantitative database included age, whether student has children, center location, waiting time for vocational training, and student educational level.

The qualitative data, however, has important limitations. First, direct associations between the factors participants believe affect success and/or retention and those actual outcomes can not be directly confirmed. Second, by their very nature, qualitative data reveal perceptions, not absolutely verifiable conditions. These perceptions can be influenced heavily by emotions or by others' beliefs. Further, these perceptions may be based on rumor or cultural myth rather than fact. An example of a cultural myth is the story heard repeatedly in every center visited – "the admission counselor told me there would be horseback riding on center." Finally, it must be acknowledged that investigators can bias qualitative findings. This remains true for this report, though the investigators have been trained to minimize bias.

Despite the fact that the data reveals perceptions of reality rather than measurable associations, it must be remembered that perceptions drive actions. In the case of retention, students make an active decision whether to stay or to leave. Staff have the ability to influence

who stays or leaves and will do so based on their own perceptions. Ideally, staff provide more supportive attention to students they judge likely to leave. Conversely, they might give up on such students or interact with them in a manner colored by their expectation that the students will not make it on center. Relevant to consideration of this phenomenon is the overwhelming response by Orientation Managers to the question, "Do you believe that student characteristics revealed during orientation allow you or your staff to predict (with a reasonable degree of accuracy) whether a student will drop out of the program or be terminated within the first 3 months of his/her stay?" Eighty-four percent responded yes to this question. Committed people who work with youth certainly develop an instinct based on their experience. However, one must consider the possibility that these perceptions could, in some cases, create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The experts of Job Corps seemed to come to consensus on the following points:

- Intrinsic unmeasured student characteristics are of great importance in determining whether students will stay. These characteristics include student commitment, attitude, motivation, confidence, maturity level, emotional status, willingness to change, and ability to interact with others.

- Whether a student has made his/her own decision to come to Job Corps makes a difference in the level of motivation and commitment a student needs to fully engage in the program.

- The staff-student relationship is critical in making a difference whether students are able to fully commit to the program. Participants repeatedly cited staff's ability to be supportive and to demonstrate caring, respect and a commitment to student success.

- Many students have emotional difficulties and/or substance use problems that may stem from a history of living in challenging circumstances. Students with these problems are more attrition-prone. Staff need to recognize these problems and be supportive to students as they attempt to overcome them.

- The ability of students to adhere to center rules, and the ability of staff to convey rules in a consistent manner that emphasizes employability, rather than restriction, makes a difference in a student's ability to acclimate to center life.

- Whether the student's vocation of choice is available on center makes a difference in that student's decision to stay. Starting that vocation in a timely manner may be important to that student's commitment to the program.

- Job Corps is a multicultural environment. Students' ability to adapt to and thrive in such an environment is important to their acclimation to center life.

CHAPTER 4 – YOUTH RETENTION:
SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS TO STAY AND SUCCEED

Philosophical Framework

Joy Dreyfoos summarizes the process whereby youth develop both risk status and internal strength:

> We can visualize the life histories of the various risk groups in this way. A train is leaving a station. Some children are born on the train and stay on until they grow up. They have supportive parents and live in a healthy community with a good school. Some children who are born on the train fall off of it because their families fall apart, or the school fails, or other stressful events occur. Some children are not born on the train and never get on it. They lack parental support, live in a poor social environment, drop out of terrible schools, and are surrounded by hopelessness. Some children are not born on the train but they manage to climb on it. These are the children that Rutter and others call "invulnerable" and "resilient." Almost always these children have had access to a caring individual who assisted them (not necessarily a parent) (Dreyfoos 1990, pg. 109).

Following this schema, Job Corps youth are generally individuals who were not on the train the first time that it went around the track. Yet, they stand apart from the millions of youth that have no hope – and they climb aboard the train. The operative question is whether a supportive environment, filled with caring individuals that are well trained in developing the strengths of youth, can ensure they don't fall off.

This chapter will focus on the extra steps a program could offer to create a supportive environment "to ensure they don't fall off" the train. It will not address the issue of program quality, content, or structure, though it must be acknowledged that these are critical issues. To return to Dreyfoos' schema, it is up to the program to make the train even worth hanging onto. The participant must feel convinced that it will take him/her in a positive direction.

There are two widely divergent, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, schools of thought on how best to approach youth with a history of disadvantage, failures, and worrisome behaviors. Over the last several decades the risk-based approach has predominated. In recent years, the resiliency-based youth development model has gained a strong foothold.

Job Corps has stood apart for decades as a program that recognized risk, but also realized that only a comprehensive, multilayered, long-term, and supportive intervention could make a difference. By nature of this comprehensive approach, Job Corps may be uniquely suited to take the next steps necessary to building stronger, more resilient youth. Youth deliver what is expected of them. Therefore, young people whose risks are highlighted will perform as "at-risk youth." Alternatively, young people whose strengths are recognized, fostered, and developed will better survive, more efficiently change, and more creatively overcome limitations to perform better in the work environment. Youth who are enrolled in a program staffed by individuals committed to student success will overcome their ambivalence and fears and choose to invest themselves in the program.

Karen Pittman, of The International Youth Foundation, summarizes the philosophy of youth development:

> When we talk about prevention, we are talking in terms of problems. But no matter how early we commit to addressing them, there is something fundamentally limiting about having everything defined by a problem. In the final analysis we do not assess people in terms of problems (or lack thereof), but potential.
>
> Case in point. If I introduced an employer to a young person I worked with by saying, 'Here's Katib. He's not a drug user. He's not in a gang. He's not a dropout. He's not a teen father. Please hire him.' the employer would respond, 'That's great. But what does he know, what can he do?' If we cannot define -- and do not give young people ample opportunities to define – what skills, values, attitudes, knowledge, and commitments we want with as much force as we can define what we do not want, we will fail. Prevention is an inadequate goal. Problem-free is not fully prepared (Pittman 1996, pg. 1).

Suggestions follow as to how Job Corps might create an environment to offer young people the support they need to increase their likelihood of staying in the program. These suggestions will be culled primarily from the resiliency-based and youth development literatures as well as the qualitative research conducted for this report.

Chapter Overview

This chapter will address retention in five sections. Section I will consider whether profiling is indicated, or worthwhile, as a means to increase retention. Section II will briefly address the harm attrition does to the individual, in an effort to justify the resources needed to promote retention. Because the attrition rate will never approach zero, Section III, will consider how to make the most out of the time Job Corps has with every student. Section IV will address how staff can prepare and support students to transition from behaving like "at-risk" youth to behaving as students who are expected to succeed. This section will consider how staff can best support youth through the stressful transition, guide them to use adaptive coping mechanisms, and communicate with them in developmentally-appropriate terms. Section V will explore how incorporating the youth development and resiliency models more heavily into program operations would increase the likelihood that students will choose to remain on center. It will address the importance of: 1) having high expectations that challenge youth; 2) recognizing the inherent strengths and resiliencies of youth; and 3) offering strategies that foster the key personal traits individuals need to feel successful and to be resilient in the long term.

Section I: The Easiest Solution: Profiling Participants to Increase Retention

When addressing solutions to attrition, we must first return to the fundamental questions – is it our goal to have zero attrition, and if so, at what cost to the mission of the program? The existing literature makes four points clear:

1) generally, at-risk youth from troubled environments are more attrition-prone;
2) among youth from these troubled environments, some will beat the odds;
3) though differences in attrition between demographic groups may be statistically significant, many leavers will come from designated low-risk groups, and many retainers will come from predicted high-risk groups;
4) it is difficult based on demographic data alone, to predict with great accuracy whether any given individual will make it in a program.

For some programs, such as the military, it makes sense to minimize recruitment of attrition-prone individuals. For the secondary schools, it is fundamental to their mission to serve everyone to ensure an educated, productive future workforce. Therefore, their efforts must look at the antecedents of school failure and strike early. Intervention programs have embraced the task of working with challenging populations in the face of known higher attrition rates and other problems. In fact, reaching youth with multiple barriers to employment is central to the mission of Job Corps. Thus, Job Corps' challenge is to create a program attractive enough to participants to recruit them, useful enough to benefit them, and supportive enough to retain them.

According to Australian psychologists Feather and O'Brien (1986), a demonstrable psychological 'profile' exists for youth that won't be able to find employment later on. The term 'profiling' refers, for our purposes, to dividing individuals into groups of those who will succeed and those who will fail before beginning an intervention.

Some researchers argue that youth who are destined to fail should be eliminated from joining programs before they begin. Cavin and Maynard (1985) explore the thought that youth who will have a hard time with a program may negatively influence other participants and should be terminated from the program early. However, they acknowledge that profiling and eliminating individuals before a program begins would be both difficult and perhaps counter-productive; the difficulty lies in developing criteria that would permit early distinction between those participants who will terminate negatively and those who will terminate positively.

Additionally, Cavin and Maynard state that 'creaming' the applicants at the outset would, "run counter to other important program goals: inevitably, some of the youth who would be screened out would have been successful, or, from another perspective, the program would be refusing to take a chance on some of the potentially most intractable youths -those for whom it was designed" (Cavin and Maynard 1985, pg. 344). Wilensky also echoes these feelings, viewing the "creaming" of the most promising, least needy recruits as a waste of resources. He called it the "great temptation to save the already saved" (Wilensky 1985, pg. 5).

Gallegos and Kahn's analysis concluded the following, "The challenge suggested by these results lies not in screening out those who are least likely to benefit from the program, but rather in the recognition that the program does well mainly with individuals with certain characteristics. The program needs to incorporate ways or means to reach those... who at present are not successful" (Gallegos and Kahn 1986, pg. 176).

Section II: The Harm of Program Dropout to the Individual

What is the harm done by program attrition? As illustrated through the large programs presented in chapter 1, the harm of attrition to the individual, to society, and to the program varies dependent on the program's mission. Therefore, while attrition is an important outcome measure for all programs, its importance should not be overgeneralized. In some programs the full completion of the course may or may not lead to a better outcome (i.e., receiving a better job, having increased knowledge) than a partial completion. Likewise, leaving a program early may not end in a negative result; the participant may have extracted what they need from the program to meet their personal objectives.

Multiple works by Maynard examine program participation and the effects of completing or dropping out. Cavin and Maynard (1985) studied a research sample of 1244 youths aged 17 to 20 years in the Supported Work Program. They argue that what made a difference was whether the separation from the program was positive or negative. They define "positive" separations as "those motivated by job placement or further training and educational opportunities" (Cavin and Maynard 1985, pg. 335). "Negative" separations include those associated with "drug use, illegal activities, poor work attachment, and job dissatisfaction of participants" (Cavin and Maynard 1985, pg. 335). With positive separations they found an average salary increase of over $100/month. Negative separations had an adverse effect on salary, which worsened with the length of participation in the program. Why individuals with negative separations have a realized net decrease in salary is not fully understood. Cavin and Maynard hypothesized that the program may have had a significant labeling effect on participants. They believed that youth who left the program under negative circumstances subsequently applied for jobs with employers who requested an appraisal of the job candidate's performance in the program and received a negative report (Cavin and Maynard 1985, pg. 338).

We also must consider the harm done to the confidence of the individual who leaves early. If the separation is positive there should be no harm done. For those individuals who leave because they can not handle the program there may be great harm done. They have taken the risk to challenge themselves after a history of failures. Another failure may make them less likely to mount the necessary confidence to make another move toward self-improvement.

In light of the possible harm that may be imposed on early leavers, Job Corps faces many challenges. First, if Job Corps maintains its central mission, any effort at increasing retention must aim to increase rates globally, rather than taking measures to serve a less needy population. Second, efforts should be made to make early separations as positive as possible. Third, acknowledging that zero attrition will never occur, efforts should be made to assure that even individuals who leave early will benefit from their stay.

Section III: Assuring Students Who Leave Early Benefit from the Program

Even the best-designed strategy to retain Job Corps youth will never achieve zero attrition. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals who leave have had maximal opportunity to benefit and have not been harmed by the experience. The interactions between staff and students will determine whether even a brief experience is productive or destructive. Staff are positioned to build students' self-esteem, confidence, connectedness, and competence. Staff can guide students toward positive coping strategies that will empower them to buffer stress in the long term and decrease their reliance on maladaptive coping strategies. They also can challenge students to promote their healthy development and guide them to avoid harmful behaviors. Much of the remainder of this chapter will explore these important interactions, as they are at the core of a strategy to make students choose to stay in the program. However, just as staff members are situated to be a positive force in these areas, they can also do significant damage in these areas through inappropriate negative interactions. Staff need to be well trained and closely supervised to assure that students receive the type of staff support necessary to promote success from their very first day on center.

Next, the program should determine what skills would benefit even those students who leave earlier than desired, by making him/her desirable to employers. These "soft" skills are, in essence, those abilities that enable someone to relate to others and adapt to a workplace environment. They round out the concrete skills offered through literacy education or vocational training to produce an employable person.

Soft skills, unlike the other components of training, can be transmitted quickly. The Support and Training Results in Valuable Employment (STRIVE) program has demonstrated a significant benefit to participants. It utilizes a three-week attitudinal training model which

focuses on developing participants' work related attitudes, coupled with job development and post placement services (Hymowitz 1997; NYU 1993). STRIVE covers punctuality, appropriate attitude, cooperation, and the ability to take constructive criticism. This three-week course reported a 5% dropout rate (counted only for the students who decided to continue after a full-day orientation). It placed 75% of participants and reported that 82% were still working at two years follow-up (NYU 1993). While these success rates may not be generalizable, they demonstrate the potential benefit "soft skills" bestow in a relatively short time frame.

Currently, Job Corps has a social skills curriculum integrated into the program that includes many soft skills. A student needs to stay in the program for a year to reap full benefit from the curriculum. Consideration should be given to offering more of these skills very early in the program.

In Section V of this chapter, the importance of early confidence building will be discussed as a pivotal determinant of an individual finding the strength to fully commit to the program. Also, the importance of students quickly attaining a feeling of connectedness to peers and staff is cited as being crucial in students' acclimation to center life.

The desire to move soft skills toward the beginning of an individual's program, combined with the necessity of building confidence and connectedness early as a means to prevent attrition generates a potentially highly productive strategy. These skills can be taught most effectively if the educational strategy uses staff and seasoned students who model, as well as teach these skills. As students achieve more quickly attainable goals, such as handling themselves well in a practice interview, their confidence and sense of competence will increase. Because of ongoing educational interactions with other students and staff, as well as the interpersonal skills-building nature of the content, their sense of connectedness will increase. These immediate successes will increase the likelihood that students will stay. Even students who leave because of external circumstances will have benefited from their stay. We do not wish to naively imply that soft skill acquisition is a matter that can always be accomplished in a short time. There may be many obstacles to overcome before a student who has learned not to trust can increase their connection with others, or before a student with a history of pain or abuse can learn to overcome impulsive anger and begin to respond more appropriately to challenge.

Dr. Jennifer Wild, the primary author of the current Social Skills Training Curriculum, believes that greater integration of the curriculum will contribute to creating the supportive milieu that will allow young people to overcome the barriers to soft skill acquisition.

> The Social Skills Training curriculum is written as a facilitation curriculum. As staff learn how to facilitate the topics and engage students in meaningful discussions, their own soft skills improve as well as their ability to connect to young people and provide caring and support. Often they learn, through the dialogue, the complexities of the young peoples' lives and are better equipped to understand and intervene appropriately 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This has a positive impact on Center culture over time. In addition, as young people receive caring guidance and support, their tendency to stay on center longer increases, benefiting the entire program by providing enough time to develop youth in all aspects. The skills that are addressed in each topic (change, diversity, creating a positive environment, and emotional intelligence) are the skills all employees need to survive and thrive in workforce 2000. (Wild J, Personal Communication, 1/17/00)

The remainder of this chapter addresses how to create a center culture where all staff are prepared to be part of the solution. It is only in this context that the acquisition of social skills will occur in a natural timely manner. The current Social Skills Curriculum is designed to operate best when fully integrated into center life, rather than when viewed as a discrete program component. To meet the objective stated here, two adjustments need to be made to the existing curriculum. First, critical components of the curriculum must be offered on a rolling basis so that all students receive core lessons early in their stay. This may best be done by having seasoned students actively engaged in the instruction, thereby also reinforcing the lesson for themselves. Second, those components of the curriculum judged to be essential in building confidence or as critical for the workplace (e.g., interview skills and the ability to accept constructive criticism) need to be developed more fully. It will be up to a well-trained center staff to assure that center life consistently reinforces soft skills appropriate for the workplace.

Section IV:

Transforming "At-Risk" Individuals to Those "Prepared to Succeed"

Avoiding Labeling and "Pulling Out" Youth Judged to be At-Risk, While Still Recognizing the Individual Needs of Each Student

Some educational experts argue that to decrease attrition of disadvantaged youth the program must never even discuss who might drop out. They feel that students will pick up on this negative attitude and will consequently be more likely to leave, following a 'self-fulfilling' negative prophecy (Golden 1995). Some see the "at-risk" label as victim blaming and suggest only using the term in regard to an individual's life situation (Winfield 1994). Similarly, the practice of tracking is seen by some as applying a label that often implies that we expect failure from a certain group of students (Franklin 1995). Winfield writes that tracking programs are "inconsistent with the notion of enhancing protective mechanisms and fostering resilience" (Winfield 1994, pg. 5). It would be a positive step to begin to use the term "at-risk" only to describe an environment, or set of circumstances, rather than an individual.

Based upon these concerns and the findings that "pulling-out" youth may backfire (See Chapter 1) it is important that retention efforts are directed at the whole population. If individuals are selected for special attention, it should be done subtly. An environment should exist where getting individual attention is commonplace; therefore, a student receiving aggressive attention to promote retention would not stand out.

Understanding that labels may be destructive does not imply that programs should avoid learning as much as possible about each student. In fact, the more detailed the description a program has of an individual, the further it can move away from relying on simplistic labels. A "label" is often used pejoratively or as a mechanism to stereotype a person to negate the need to understand the complexity of the individual. To enrich an intervention and better target Job Corps' approach to working with its participants, it is necessary to know on some level, case by case, who the students are and what makes up their life experience.

Currently, most programs collect easily measured demographic information such as gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and educational status. These are important variables to

consider, but they only begin to describe a person. This information tells nothing about the student's behavior, mood, self-concept, strengths, or survival strategies. While tools to measure and describe these attributes, are time and labor intensive, such an assessment can uncover risk factors and existing sources of protection.

It is helpful to select and adjust the type, timing, and intensity of the program components for each individual (Nettles 1993). This detailed assessment of the individual improves the possibility that he/she will obtain the proper support through the initial adjustment period (Richards-Colocino 1996). By initially targeting supportive aspects of the program to the individual, the program stands a better chance of keeping the individual involved (increasing retention), in affecting long-term change in the participant, and in increasing employment prospects.

Creating a Supportive Setting for Working with Youth with Interrelated Risk Histories

Placing students who have failed out of one environment (e.g., school) back into the same type of environment invites further failure; it is therefore necessary to develop different approaches to teaching than traditional formats (Holloway 1980). Dropouts already have felt rejection from the main institution (high school) that was supposed to prepare them for their futures. It is likely that when they step into another institution they are prepared for another rejection (Golden 1995). Therefore, any program working with school dropouts must quickly demonstrate their acceptance of the participant so the participant does not reject the institution preemptively.

Especially for youth whose life experience may have taught them to mistrust, a successful program must demonstrate trustworthy characteristics. It needs to clearly communicate that it has a strong unwavering intent to serve its participants and through action it must demonstrate that it can help the individual. Dropout is a predictable outcome when clients feel that their needs are not being addressed (Solomon and Evans 1992).

Proper adjustment to a residential center is a key element of success in the program. Participants that succeed develop relationships with other people, and are involved in activities. Often their biggest obstacle is adjusting to being away from home and altering their daily routines (Shaw 1995). Helping them acclimate to a new setting and develop a positive daily routine is extremely important. To make a reasonable transition they "need to feel a sense of

safety and security, a sense of hope about their futures" (Greene 1993). Transitioning youth must quickly become a part of the institution.

Youth may find authority challenging, or not trustworthy. Aber and Allen point out that chronic cumulative trauma – whether from within the family, the neighborhood or the school setting - impairs the establishment of interpersonal trust (Aber and Allen 1987; Greene 1993). Supportive intimate relationships are lacking and the concept of trust comes under attack. Conditions must be minimized that will trigger insecure negatively biased states of mind (Mills 1988). The demands placed on participants and the way requirements are enforced may inadvertently make a young person feel mistrusted, disrespected or overly controlled. This can set in place a reactive confrontation that leads to a disciplinary cycle. To decrease attrition, a program may need to reassess its approach towards the participants, perhaps by decreasing the 'threatening' nature of the rules or by increasing the participants' sense of autonomy and involvement (Greene 1993).

Margaret Wang, of the National Research Center on Education in the Inner Cities, discusses the development of a broad-based intervention program known as the Learning City Program. This program demonstrated the necessity and effectiveness of creating a supportive environment using collaborative teams that allow different levels of teaching (whole class, small group and one-on-one tutoring) to increase retention (Wang 1996). This collaborative approach included the use of regular and special education teachers and "specialist" professionals such as school psychologists, speech pathologists, and other service providers, as well as families, and the community.

Supporting Students Through Crisis

The individuals that come to post secondary school intervention programs are likely to come from stressful home situations; therefore, they may deal with more tragedy in their lives than the average student. Having to deal with a crisis at home will push students to leave the program. Without immediate reaction and support from their program, these students may never come back.

Further, participants may feel baseline ambivalence about trying to raise themselves beyond the means of their family or of having left their family in difficult circumstances. This ambivalence will become more acute if crises occur at home. Retaining a student under these

circumstances will be challenging. Students must understand that their loved one's needs may best be met by the student's successful completion of the program.

First, there must be a policy that allows for appropriate leave and an easy, supported reacclimation into the program. But, intensive support should be available both before the student departs and after they return. A group of psychiatrists and psychologists at Yale University advocates a school (or program) based crisis response team. This group, including trained administrators, therapists, and fellow participants, is prepared to talk about and deal with significant crisis, discuss what they learned about themselves and their coping responses to crisis, and share this with others undergoing similar problems (Kline et al. 1995).

Ongoing Counseling

Counseling is a mainstay of any program working with youth with interrelated risk behaviors. Programs need to incorporate multiple counseling venues. They range from the basics of working on group and personal interactions to discussing in-depth the individual's life, feelings and coping mechanisms, and to preparing the youth for an improved future.

Counseling acts as one of the safety nets for youth walking a tightrope between their old, often dysfunctional, lives and the new life that Job Corps offers them. It is important that the counselor working with extremely distressed individuals, does not ignore work issues even when resolving emotionally laden issues. The counselor should not lose sight of the fact that the incompetence a student may feel in vocational training may lead to the student leaving. In that case, any opportunity to work on long-standing psychological issues is lost, as is the opportunity for employability preparation. Counseling must not be limited to discrete sessions, rather, it should be seen as a universal program value. Every adult on campus can offer guidance. In many cases, students may relate more to the maintenance worker, the secretary, or the chef than formally designated counselors. Thus, all of these staff members should have received appropriate training to prepare them to comfortably fill these roles.

The Staff-Student Relationship: The Crucial Ingredient in Promoting Youth Development

Throughout the youth development and resiliency literatures, relationships with adults are cited as one of the key ingredients needed to support young people to make effective changes in their lives (Mundy 1996; Embry 1997; Wright 1996; Davis et al. 1994; Blum 1998; Dreyfoos

1990). Resilient youth often point to a caring individual in their lives who believed in them, nurtured them, and modeled a high standard of behavior (Dreyfoos 1990; Mills 1988; Winfield 1994). Parents are ideally positioned to be these forces during childhood, but the adult does not have to be a parent. In intervention programs, particularly residential ones, staff members are the most influential adults. They not only fill the role of the caring adult, they can model adaptive behaviors. Further, staff may find themselves serving as proxy parents. In some cases, because students may have come from highly stressful homes, staff need not only fill healthy adult roles, but also need to help students overcome suspicion that all adults are dangerous.

Certain character traits have been highlighted as being most important in a staff member's ability to influence a student. These include a demonstration of respect for teenagers and their opinions and an ability to show that one cares deeply about students (McMillan et al. 1992). In fact, students who feel disrespected are less likely to stay in the program (Shaw 1995). Respect can be displayed in many ways and may be inextricably linked to caring. Feeling respected is related to the value of knowing that someone believes in you; likewise the feeling that program staff respect you reinforces one's inner sense that life can work. Key to a program respecting its students is assuring that their input is collected, valued and utilized (Mills et al. 1988). Golden evaluated an alternative school program and emphasized that in successful programs staff never belittled students' concerns, whether those concerns ranged from family death to celebrations (Golden 1995). Franklin (1995) suggests that teachers learn urban history, sociology, and cultural awareness to help them better understand the forces shaping and impacting their students. In addition, staff demonstrate respect by treating students as adults who are expected to be accountable for their actions and responsible for creating a thriving community. Staff also demonstrate respect when they relate directly with students, taking steps to move beyond their supervisory roles (e.g., sharing meals, participating in special events, and participating in recreational activities) (Mundy 1996).

Students must feel that people around them genuinely care about their personal lives as well as their academic performance. Students in a continuation high school attributed their liking of the school to the teachers who listened, cared, and understood (Golden 1995). Mills advocates that "these youth have the inherent capability of developing a more mature outlook of functioning with common sense, of having an interest in learning and a natural attraction to nondeviant lifestyles" (Mills et al. 1988, pg. 644). Mills feels that it is first necessary to remove

the external circumstances reinforcing conditioned ways of reacting to the environment. Then, if guided by committed individuals in a supportive environment, students can adopt a more mature prosocial perspective.

Because young people relate to others as others relate to them, the quality of the staff-student relationship is of central importance in a program whose mission is to develop youth. The tendency to view students as incompetent, unmotivated, non-resourceful individuals doomed to failure, may be the norm in some intervention programs (Floyd 1996) but is unacceptable. By emphasizing a strong work ethic and building a context for meaningful and reliable relationships between staff and students, this trend can be reversed (Newberg and Sims 1996). When students recognize that their teachers expect the best from them, and will offer them genuine support, they are likely to be motivated to deliver their best.

Pittman states that staff intent on "fixing" youth miss the opportunity for maximal impact ". . . the 'fix-problems-first' assumption is antithetical to the dynamic of development. While problems must be addressed, it is a commitment to development the offering of relationships, networks, challenges, opportunities to contribute – that motivates growth and change" (Pittman 1996, pg. 5). Further, this fix-it paradigm does not inspire an individual to engage themselves in challenges and has prevented disadvantaged youth from getting the same opportunities as advantaged youth because their due resources have been misallocated.

> No one is inspired when they walk in the door and are greeted with "We're here to fix you.' But that is what we do. . . . We assume that if young people, or families, have problems, that these have to be fixed before there is any interest or justification for exploring opportunities for development. "Low-risk" youth in "low-risk" communities get orchestras, summer camps, accelerated learning opportunities. "High-risk" youth in "high-risk" communities get substance abuse prevention counseling and diversion programs. But until there is a challenge, there is no reason that any person, young or old, is going to be sufficiently engaged to change (Pittman 1996, pg. 6).

Staff Guidance to Strengthen Prosocial Coping Skills as a Means to Reduce Stress

A well-trained staff prepared to guide young people towards positive coping strategies may be pivotal in determining whether a student is able to handle the stresses of a new environment. Students equipped with a repertoire of positive coping strategies are prepared to overcome adversity.

"Stress is the personal interpretation and subjective experience of risk" (Blum 1998, pg. 370). Stress creates a state of emotional and biologic discomfort. It demands a response. In a

life threatening emergency, that response is either to fight or to flee. However, most stressful situations cannot be conquered through fighting or running. Therefore, people either succumb to the stresses, through emotional or physical breakdown, or they develop coping responses. For youth from risky environments, stress is an ever present phenomenon. Thus, they have developed coping strategies to deal with stressful existences. By definition, their strategies have been successful if they modified the discomfort caused by the stress. However, just as a resilient person may "bounce-back" in a destructive manner, a person's coping strategy can be constructive or destructive.

The youth of Job Corps have all survived stressful environments. While their coping strategies may not have been prosocial, they are, at the least, familiar, and may be comfortable. Upon entering Job Corps they experience unfamiliar stresses. If the stress is too uncomfortable, they may choose to leave. On the other hand, if youth are supported to cope with the new stressors, they will achieve a new sense of confidence in their ability to handle new situations. And, effective prosocial coping strategies are essential tools to deal with the world of work.

Figure 1 illustrates the coping process. First, a stress is experienced. The stress creates emotional and physical discomfort. The individual, therefore, must choose a coping response. In the immediate setting, the individual will successfully cope by choosing any strategy that lessens the emotional and physical discomfort. The challenge is to guide young people to choose positive strategies.

Coping strategies are generally divided into problem-focused and emotion focused. Problem focused strategies attempt to deal with the problem and emotion-focused strategies attempt to deal with the emotional reaction to the problem. Generally, adolescents with more problem-focused strategies have fewer adjustment problems. (Allen and Heibert 1991; Fields and Prinz 1997). Blechman equates mental health with success at coping prosocially with the challenges inherent in a chaotic and often hostile social environment (Blechman et al. 1995).

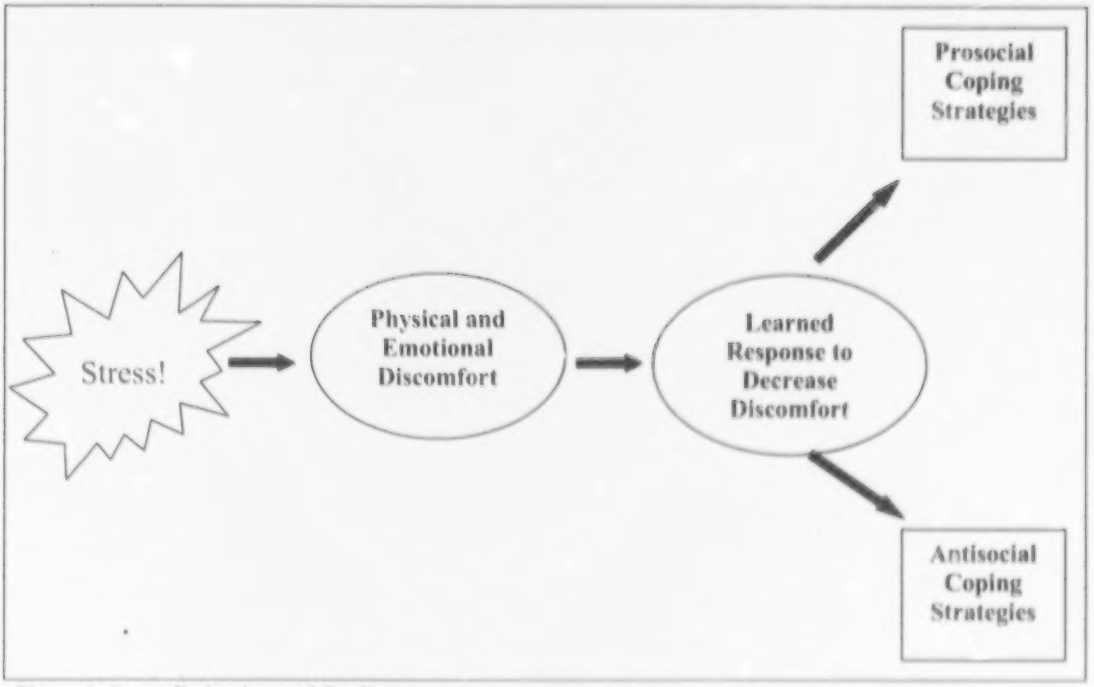


Figure 1: Stress Reduction and Coping

Regardless of whether the coping strategy is problem or emotion-focused, it may be prosocial (positive) or antisocial (negative) in nature. For example a student can respond to academic pressure by studying or by smoking marijuana to relax. A youth could respond to feelings of anger or frustration by fighting or through exercise. In all cases the youth has successfully coped, but with very different outcomes.

The simplistic coping schema illustrated by Figure 1 can be used as a first step toward understanding, and perhaps modifying behaviors. Condemning negative behaviors or pointing out their dangers puts the interventionist into direct conflict with the young person. Rather, one has to look at the behavior in the context of the person's life and try to assess what adaptive (coping) function it has had for that person. This less judgmental approach then positions the interventionist to support the creation of alternative prosocial adaptive (coping) responses.

A programmatic goal should be to have participants possess a rich repertoire of positive coping strategies. The support toward developing these strategies must begin early during

orientation when stress is very acute and when students will be tempted to return to destructive, but comfortable, coping strategies.

Again, staff members play a key role in this plan. They will have no legitimacy to teach this content area unless they personally use a wide variety of internal and external resources to manage stress. A staff member who uses cigarettes to achieve calm and who yells inappropriately when angry cannot effectively convey to youth that there are more appropriate means of stress reduction than marijuana or fighting.

The Substance User as a Model for Developing Alternative Coping Strategies

Substance use is an antisocial negative behavior with long range consequences for the user and society. Job Corps' zero tolerance policy for drug use sends a clear message that drug use is incompatible with being a Job Corps student. Job Corps clearly delineates the problem and tells students what they cannot do. But, does it tell youth what they can do?

While some young people may experiment with drugs purely for the thrill of rebellion or for the sensation of being high, most use them to deal with uncomfortable feelings. The literature offers two dominant theories as to why youth use drugs. The first says that drugs provide stimulation to sensation seeking youth. The other theory views teenagers' use of drugs as a means to self medicate, by treating or masking problems (Rhodes and Jason 1990).

Marijuana is an example of a drug that is used for coping – it deadens the senses to stress. Youth describe it as a drug that helps them "to chill." Though it is highly destructive, this drug has served an important role. During a stressful time of transition, students may feel the need to return to the stress reduction habit they have experienced as effective. Prohibiting its use alone may backfire because the young person may not have alternate coping strategies.

The roots of drug addiction can be seen using the model shown in Figure 1. Individuals do not intend to head down the spiraling path of drug addiction. Rather, perhaps through sensation seeking or urging from a friend, a person learns that drugs or alcohol make them feel differently for a while. Perhaps this different feeling is a respite from uncomfortable feelings. This may not impair their ability to function if used rarely. However, during a time of particular stress they revert repeatedly to their learned response. Because their now frequent drug use causes them to function poorly in school, work, or home, they receive appropriate negative feedback. The criticism they receive increases their stress level, so they seek more mind-altering

substances to dampen their worsening emotional state. By this point, physical and/or psychological addiction has the opportunity to take hold.

A first step toward promoting drug abstinence is educating youth about the dangers of substance dependency. Conveying this message may be less challenging to youth from at-risk environments. These youth know the problems of drug use because they have witnessed the damage to their communities, and therefore have consistently lower drug use than suburban youth (Kann et al. 1998).

However, rather than only telling youth what not to do, they must be told what to do. The most important step toward preventing youth from turning to drugs for stress reduction is to teach and model for them a wide variety of effective positive coping strategies. These include controlling or preventing the physical discomforts of stress through routine exercise to counter chronic stress; vigorous exercise to alleviate acute stress; and meditation and deep breathing to regain controlled thinking. Strategies for controlling emotional discomfort include means to displace negative feelings or to work through them. Some ideas include talking, singing, writing a journal, creating poetry or rap, and worship. Of course, the ultimate strategy is to consider how the source of stress can be addressed through positive action. Examples include doing homework for school related anxiety, community service to overcome feelings of hopelessness, guiding loved ones under stress to seek help, and cultural connectedness to combat loneliness.

Staff Prepared to Communicate in a Manner Appropriate to Each Student's Developmental Stage Can Best Support Youth Towards Positive Change

Job Corps' challenge to meet its goals is all the greater because of the range of ages – and, therefore stages of development – of its students. It serves young persons in mid adolescence, late adolescence and post adolescence. People in these stages react differently to knowledge of risk behaviors, to the prospect of behavioral change, and to authority and rules. Staff who do not understand the developmental tasks of adolescence are likely to treat all students identically, thereby setting them up to fail. While there cannot be different standards for people at different levels of development, staff need to subtly modify their own behaviors when working with youth at different stages.

Pittman nicely summarizes what is known about development. She describes six key characteristics of development: 1) it is ongoing, spanning from the late elementary school years

to as late as the mid twenties; 2) it is uneven, varying among different people; 3) it is complex, spanning several different areas of growth; 4) it is influenced by environment; 5) it is mediated through relationships; and 6) it is triggered by participation (Pittman 1996). The first three characteristics will be discussed here, the latter three will be discussed in later sections.

1. *It is ongoing, spanning from the late elementary school years to as late as the mid twenties.*

   Development begins with an individual fully dependent on caretakers. By the end of adolescence, the individual should be fully capable of caring for him/herself. Thus, the fundamental developmental task of adolescence is to gain full autonomy. Different theorists choose different endpoints of adolescence. For some, the end of adolescence comes when the body is fully mature and the individual is capable of living on his/her own. Others consider adolescence a stage that spans all of the educational years and ends only when a person is fully prepared for their livelihood. Therefore, some theorists would include all Job Corps students as adolescents.

2. *It is uneven, varying among different people.*

   Generally, adolescence is divided into three stages; early adolescence ranging from ages 9-13; middle adolescence ranging from ages 14-17; and late adolescence ranging from ages 18-21. Each of these stages has different developmental tasks and different potential crises. The age parameters of these stages are somewhat artificial, because physical development is a stronger mediator of these stages than chronological age. Females generally mature at a faster rate than boys. Peer groups and social opportunities also mediate how quickly an individual might pass through developmental tasks. Regardless, Job Corps includes some mid-adolescents, some late-adolescents, and some young adults.

3. *It is complex, spanning several different areas of growth.*

   Adolescent development involves an interplay of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral growth. Volumes have been written exploring these facets of growth. A very brief overview will be presented here.

Adolescent physical growth is a phenomenon that starts at puberty and is mediated by hormones. Generally, females start physically maturing before males. Its interplay with the other developmental issues is largely due to changes in body image and sexuality. The adolescent needs to become comfortable with his/her changing body. Consequently, early to mid adolescents are acutely aware of peers' perceptions of their physical appearance, and repeatedly "check-in" to see if they are normal. In most cases, by the time an individual can enroll in Job Corps, at the age of 16, their physical development is complete or near completion. Of greatest relevance to Job Corps is the relationship between physical development and sexuality. The younger students at Job Corps are still close to the time when they, and others, first began seeing them as sexual beings. That process may have been healthy or filled with exploitation or abuse.

Though less obvious than physical changes, the mind undergoes equally dramatic changes during adolescence. An understanding of adolescent cognitive development is critical for any staff member who is proposing that youth take on a future orientation-either by abstaining from risk behaviors or by preparing themselves to be employable. Children and early adolescents think concretely. They understand things precisely as they appear and judge individuals by how they are treated by them. They do not understand how current actions can have future consequences. They do not understand the underlying motivations of others and are therefore easily influenced and exploited. The late adolescent thinks abstractly, though 15-20% of individuals never achieve abstract thinking. The abstract thinker is able to consider future consequences of current behaviors and can grasp others' underlying motivations. These are two highly protective characteristics in that they help the individual to avoid negative behaviors.

A critical developmental task adolescents must achieve is the transformation from concrete to abstract thinker. Hormonal changes trigger the brain to be able to develop abstract thought. But, the primary lessons of cognitive development – future consequences and underlying motivations – are learned through trial and error. People make mistakes and/or are exploited by others. After each event they become somewhat protected from similar mistakes in the future. This type of learning is effective, but dangerous. In the case of Job Corps, making mistakes through trial and error can create a cycle of failures that will lead to early separation. Thus, the younger, less cognitively mature students are at risk of early separation.

A well-trained staff, adept at the art of communication with adolescents, can intervene in a manner that will help these students avoid real-life experimentation. Most adults try to guide

adolescents through lecturing. A lecture is generally filled with multiple abstract concepts that the early and mid-adolescent cannot grasp. Rather, techniques exist that allow teenagers to be guided through potential mistakes in safe settings. (Clark and Ginsburg 1995; Ginsburg 1999). Through active adult guidance, they may be able to avoid the mistakes that lead to separation from the program, or to dire real-life consequences.

Social development is another area of great importance for adolescents. Because the achievement of autonomy is the fundamental developmental task of adolescence, it includes a process of separation from adult authority and closer affiliation with peers. In early and middle adolescence, the need to be accepted by one's peer group dominates social interactions. By late adolescence the peer group is less important and individual identity has taken on greater importance. It is important to realize that the younger students at Job Corps are still going through this transitional period.

Moral development is also tightly linked with how one perceives authority and rules. Kohlberg (1987) describes the process of moral development as moving through six levels. At level 1, moral decisions are based on an individual's desire to avoid punishment. At this stage, the primary drive is to avoid "getting caught." There are few constraints at this level of morality because an adolescent is likely to proceed with an action if the perceived positive rewards outweigh the fear of punishment. At level 2, a person's motivation for behaving morally is the satisfaction of personal, social, or physical needs. During this stage, an individual thinks a great deal about fairness – they will act "correctly" so long as they perceive that they are treated correctly in return. At level 3, a person's motivation for moral behavior is driven by their desire to be seen as a good person. This is generally tied to basic moral standards of "society." The danger here is when there is a conflict between the moral standards of authority figures and those of peers. Both represent a "society" that the adolescent may wish to please. At level 4, the individual recognizes the importance of rules in maintaining social order. At level 5, an individual understands the standards of society and understands the rights of the individual. At this stage, adolescents are prone to arguing extenuating circumstances. The rare individual who reaches level 6, recognizes universal ethical standards that override standard morality. These are the individuals who might break the laws of a society for a higher justice (e.g., civil rights activists) (Kohlberg 1981; Ingersoll 1992). Gilligan (1982) suggested that gender specific scales

should be used because males were more likely to be socialized to be independent, and females were more likely to be concerned with relationships and interdependence.

In an effort to increase retention, it is important that Job Corps' staff understand the developmental tasks of adolescence and to know how to communicate effectively with youth at different developmental changes. This will position them to promote healthy development and to be effective change-agents for youth. It also will prevent staff from engaging in unnecessary conflict with youth.

We will offer one example that may be particularly relevant to retention. The students at Job Corps are exposed to a great deal of structure. The more mature students may see this structure as consistent with the world-of-work and understand how adjustment to it will prepare them to become more employable. (Alternatively, older youth may see the rules as burdensome and more appropriate for the younger students – as expressed in some focus groups conducted for this report). The younger students will likely benefit greatly from structure, and if handled properly, may welcome it in their lives. However, when their fundamental life task is to gain autonomy, they are likely to see rules as the antithesis of autonomy. Dependent on their level of cognitive development, they may be unable to make the connection between something they perceive as burdensome now and a benefit in the future. Dependent on their level of social development they are more or less likely to confront authority, for the sake of portraying a desired image to their peers. Dependent on their level of moral development, they may view rules as restrictions to be broken if one can avoid being caught; as necessary for the social order of Job Corps; as unfair because staff do not follow the same restrictions; or as inflexible because they do not take into account extenuating circumstances.

It is for all of these reasons that parents and adult caregivers often have problems with middle-aged adolescents and rules. These conflicts often lead to adolescent rebellion. The purely authoritarian parent who states, "You will do as you are told while under my roof" often reaps rebellion as their child tries to get out from under their roof. Parents who take time to explain the purposes of rules, engage their children in the development of appropriate rules, and exhibit flexibility for extenuating circumstances are more likely to avoid rebellion. The quantitative research presented in this report substantiates that there is a statistical difference in reason for leaving Job Corps related to age, with younger participants more likely to be separated for disciplinary reasons or to have gone AWOL. The qualitative research revealed complaints

about the burden of rules on center, with the younger students consistently more ardent with their concerns. We believe that rebellion against authority and related attrition will decrease by having a staff well-trained in explaining the rationale of rules to teenagers and including them in creating a community standard of rules.

Section V: Incorporating Resiliency and Youth Development Theory into the Program as a Means to Increase Retention

Defining Resiliency

Though no standard definition of resilience exists, all theorists include an individual's capability to respond successfully to adversity. Freiberg describes resilience as "the ability to learn from, and seek out, positive elements of the environment without replicating the disabling elements" (Freiberg 1993, pg. 365). Wright states, "Resiliency is the ability to successfully overcome the effects of a high risk environment and to develop social competence despite exposure to severe stress" (Wright 1996, pg. 2). While "not as consistently successful as their advantaged peers, resilient youth have exceptional survival skills" (Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas 1995, pg. 223). Resilient youth have the ability to turn adversity into opportunity, and they see mistakes as mechanisms by which they can learn (Brooks 1994).

Resilience is not a fixed attribute, however. One's capacity for resilience changes with circumstances and operates most critically at turning points in one's life (Blechman, Prinz, and Dumas 1995). It must be stressed that resilience is not synonymous with invulnerability (Franklin 1995; Blum 1998), even resilient youth need continued support to foster and strengthen their resiliency at crisis points.

Participants in intervention programs, have demonstrated resilience by taking a positive step to alter their circumstances despite a history of failures. This drive to overcome their past distinguishes them from the many youth who do not believe any action they take will make a difference. This demonstration of resiliency is encouraging, it is up to the program to support them to further develop resiliences in the face of different challenges.

Recognizing Classically Unappreciated Strengths in Youth

The classic model for dealing with troubled youth has been the Damage Model, which states that dysfunctional families, communities, or societies cause tremendous harm to those around them. This model tends to view young adults in this environment as passive participants of difficult situations that lead to psychopathology. An alternative model, the Challenge Model, acknowledges problems but interprets difficulties as challenging opportunities. In this model, youth are made to realize the unique strength they possess in having rebounded from hardships, instead of succumbing to them (Project Resiliency, Wolin et al. 1997; Wolin 1995).

The process of guiding youth to recognize their own strengths involves a three-stage process. First, staff must recognize students' strengths. Under the risk paradigm, the staff mission is to fix the problems created by environmental damage. The therapeutic direction is one way – from staff to student. In contrast, "The resiliency model credits people with the strength and the potential to recover and bounce back from hardship. It honors their power to help themselves, and casts professionals as partners rather than as authorities, initiators, and directors of the change process" (Project Resiliency, Wolin et al. 1997, pg. 1). In order for staff to notice assets they must recognize that youth are capable of changes and are not only dominated by problems (Davis and Boster 1992). Second, students must acknowledge the strengths of each other. Students can find good in each other through group sessions in which every individual has the opportunity to discuss his or her opinions and life experiences. In so doing, they can learn to value each other (Davis et al.1994). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students must realize their own innate strengths. Staff need to "catch" the students when they are demonstrating their strengths, and to process these events with students.

Participants' experiences, cultural knowledge, and language should be exploited as strengths rather than seen as deficits (Winfield 1994). Different ethnic groups have their own unique approaches to foster cohesiveness within the family and community. These natural strengths have been instilled in youth since infancy and only need to be channeled to help students reach their potential. In fact, Wright notes that ethnic minority cultures share many values with resiliency theory. "In contrast to the value placed on individuality by the dominant culture, the African-American emphasis on communitarianism, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Island American emphasis on family harmony, and the Native American value of cooperation within the group are closely aligned with positive protective strategies" (Wright 1996, pg. 6).

Protective Factors Fostering Resiliency

The root of resiliency lies in the existence of protective factors within a young adult's environment (Mundy 1996; Hoge et al. 1996; Guetzloe 1994; Nettles and Pleck 1993; Floyd 1996; Braverman et al. 1994). These factors have been divided into three distinct categories, based on whether they come from the young person, the family, or the community. The personal characteristics that have been demonstrated to be protective include effective problem-solving skills, a happy temperament, a sense of purpose, social competence, and autonomy or an internal locus of control. In addition, it is protective for youth to perceive all experiences constructively, play an active role in solving one's own life problems, and to have the ability to gain others' positive attentions (Rudmann 1991). The literature also emphasizes the role of the family in providing nurturing relationships, faith in overcoming adversity, an expectation that the young adult will help with chores and other responsibilities, and a belief in his/her innate abilities for the future. Finally, the community can establish strong social networks, a nurturing and responsive school, a strong relationship with a teacher or other adult outside the home, and various opportunities for youth to participate in meaningful tasks. In the case of intervention programs, particularly those that are residential, staff are situated to impart some of the protective messages normally reserved for family members and the community.

The Search Institute has delineated forty developmental assets that promote healthy youth development. Table 1 is adapted from their work (Search Institute 1997). When considering these assets in the context of Job Corps, the reader should remember that Job Corps substitutes for the community and that staff may be able to convey some of the protective traits inherent in healthy families. Staff, however, will never be able to fill the basic security needs that should have come from the family. What staff can do is recognize and develop the assets described.

Table 1: Forty Developmental Assets

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning
- Achievement motivation
- School engagement
- Homework
- Bonding to school
- Reading for pleasure

Positive Values
- Caring
- Equality and social justice
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Responsibility
- Restraint from risk behaviors

Social competencies
- Planning and decision-making
- Interpersonal competence
- Cultural competence
- Resistance skills
- Peaceful conflict resolution

Positive Identity
- Personal power
- Self-esteem
- Sense of purpose
- Positive view of personal future

External Assets

Support
- Family support
- Positive family communication
- Other adult relationships
- Caring neighborhood
- Caring school climate
- Parent involvement in schooling

Empowerment
- Community values youth
- Youth has useful roles, are seen as resources
- Service to others
- Fells safe at home, at school, in neighborhood

Boundaries and Expectations
- Family has clear rules and consequences
- School has clear rules and consequences
- Neighbors monitor behavior
- Adult role models
- Positive peer influence
- High Expectations

Constructive use of Time
- Creative activities
- Youth programs
- Religious community
- Time at home

How Do We Develop Protective Factors?

Different theorists have developed varied conceptualizations on how programs can develop protective factors in youth. Wolin and Wolin (1996) discuss seven resiliencies:

- Relationships – close ties to other people
- Insight – the ability to recognize the signs of problems in others and to not take blame for one's life circumstances. For example, a young adult whose mother is drug addicted coming to recognize that the problem's origin lies with the mother and not something the individual did to drive the mother to drugs.
- Independence –getting away from one's family and problems, perhaps by taking jobs or becoming involved in after school activities
- Initiative – the development of competence to solve one's problems
- Creativity – taking the difficult and learning to deal with it through art, imagination, or dance
- Humor
- Morality – principled behavior and decision making; sticking up for others

The International Youth Foundation outlines seven community (or program) supports that promote healthy youth development (Pittman 1996, pg. 5).

1) Stable places
2) Basic care and services
3) Healthy relationships with peers and adults
4) High expectations and standards
5) Role models, resources and networks
6) Challenging experiences and opportunities to participate and contribute
7) High quality instruction and training

The literature stresses relationships most often as being essential for resiliency development. A hallmark of resiliency is the presence of at least one bond with an adult who has high expectations and provides stability and attention to youth (Mundy 1996). Bowen and

Chapman (1996) state that efforts to promote adaptation must be directed towards increasing youth's sense of social support, particularly from parents, neighbors, and teachers.

In addition, initiative is an important element in developing resilience. As mentioned above, one of the protective factors found within the resilient individual is an internal locus of control. That is, one believes that he or she has power over his or her environment. In fact, some experts believe that locus of control is the most consistent measure of one's ability to buffer stress (Kliewer and Sandler 1992; Gordon 1996; McMillan 1992). By developing an internal locus of control and thus the feeling that one can dictate events, one can drastically reduce the negative impact of events. This becomes an essential step in reducing the effects of risk factors thereby decreasing the odds of poor outcomes for these youth. An intervention program targeted at youth in high-risk situations can decrease negative outcomes by either altering youths' exposure to risks or by altering the meaning of experiences (Smith and Carlson 1997). The subjective interpretation of an event will determine its effect on a particular individual.

Finally, a hallmark of resiliency is the development of a bicultural identity. Being bicultural means being able to operate effectively both in one's own culture and in the mainstream (Gordon 1996). The literature continuously stresses the importance of developing ethnic pride and cultural identities in minority youth (Howard 1996; Lindenberg 1994; Freiberg 1993; Smith 1997).

The Four C's of Resiliency Building Programs

Blum discusses a model of healthy youth development, derived from the work of R. Little. It describes four basic traits to be promoted in youth as a means to build longstanding resiliency. These four characteristics have come to be known as "the four C's" and include – competence, character, confidence, and connectedness (Blum 1998).

While a program committed to building long-term success should foster these four traits, it takes intensive involvement over time to do so. All of these characteristics are important ingredients of a successful person, but confidence and connectedness are the key variables that must be generated quickly if a program hopes to retain youth. It is important to realize that these four characteristics are not, in fact, discrete variables. For example, one of the best means to gain confidence is to experience a feeling of competence.

Competence Building

Job Corps is a competency building program. Its central mission is to increase its students' vocational and educational competencies. While this competency should be firmly established after completion of coursework, youth have the opportunity on a daily basis to experience increasing competency. With this competency building, there is an increase in confidence, a sense of control is trusted a bit more, and the student will give him/herself a chance to gain further competencies by staying in the program.

Research on the development of competency may offer some insight into the process. Youths' competence correlates directly with their belief that they have control over their environment (Kliewer and Sandler 1992; McMillan 1992; Sagor 1996). For example, individuals from at-risk environments who experience an internal locus of control will perform better on exams and achieve better grades than those with an external locus of control (Enger et al.1994; Floyd 1996; Gordon 1996). In order to develop competence, it becomes critical that students are given opportunities to feel in control.

The literature on competence building focuses on providing youth experiences of responsibility, autonomy, and success. Youth must be given opportunities to excel, doing work that challenges them but that they can accomplish (Wolin and Wolin 1996). It is simply not sufficient to provide youth with a "staged" success. Rather, the opportunities given must be *authentic* experiences of success for youth (Sagor 1996; Gregory 1995). If youth do not feel that their successes are genuine, they will not feel valued or important.

While praise out of context feels false and condescending, active nurturing and mentorship toward a success can be highly motivating. Every person has an "island of competence," something at which he or she excels, even if they feel they are drowning in an "ocean of inadequacy" (Brooks 1994, pg. 549). These islands are potential sources of pride and achievement. Staff must find positive attributes in every participant, help him or her to recognize them as such, and then foster those traits. After this has been achieved counselors can move out to less secure areas and help build overall competence. Reinforcing these islands creates a ripple effect whereby an individual receives the confidence necessary to confront future life challenges (Brooks 1994; Rutter 1985). Katz notes that "...being able to showcase our

talents, and to have them valued by important people in our lives, helps us define our identities around that which we do best" (Katz 1994, pg. 10).

The youth development literature refers to the importance of making youth understand the power they hold as integral members of the larger community. (Pittman 1996; Blum 1998). Both Wolin (1995) and Freiberg (1993) discuss the idea of giving every student a responsibility in the family or the community, providing him or her with a sense of autonomy. The opportunities may include a leadership role in service projects or mentoring newer students. In one program, older students learn about non-violent conflict resolution, and they must then teach the techniques they have learned to younger students (Stephens 1997). Potential projects to be implemented include serving lunch to the homeless or restoring a run-down community playground (Search Institute and Griffin-Wiesner 1995). These experiences should provide students with a sense of accomplishment, making them feel that they play a valuable role either in their own insulated communities or in the community-at-large (Braverman et al.1994).

Character Building

Helping youth develop their characters plays a critical role in terms of employability. Programming that builds character does so "through values that give meaning and direction to youth, such as individual responsibility, honesty, community service, responsible decision-making, and integrity in relationships" (Blum 1998, pg. 372). Some of these character traits are quite personal, and may be the most difficult to foster. However, Gregory (1995) describes those who turn their lives around as recognizing the personal need to change. He considers such individuals to be motivated by pride and by a desire not to be failures.

Of the seven resiliencies listed in Project Resilience, five relate to character building. Insight and independence must ultimately come from within. Creativity and humor depend on the individual, as well. Morality, defined by the authors as sticking up for others, may be the most obviously associated with character building, although the most difficult for an individual outside oneself to develop. Nonetheless, all these traits can be encouraged, fostered, and modeled by outside sources (Wolin and Wolin 1996).

Law Related Education (LRE) has focused on the development of character. LRE theorizes that to affect a change, one must influence an individual's thinking. This necessitates fostering reasoning skills, problem solving, and an understanding of others' feelings and

thoughts. In addition, LRE teaches students to stop and think before they act, and helps them to develop alternate interpretations of rules and obligations (Wright 1996). In so doing, LRE, like conflict resolution programs and Project Resilience's seven resiliencies, provide the individual with an ability to cope, both in the workplace and in life in general.

Character education develops around the values of love, truthfulness, tolerance, responsibility, and fairness (Stephens 1997). Job Corps' multicultural environment provides an ideal setting in which to develop certain positive character traits. The multicultural environment is likely to be new and somewhat challenging to many of the program's youth. Learning tolerance and fairness, however, are important steps toward workplace preparedness. Youth must recognize the link between development of character and their ability to improve their life circumstances (Newberg and Sims 1996).

Again, youth often perform in the way that they believe adults expect them to perform. A program committed to building character expects its staff to model appropriate values. It expects honesty and responsibility from its students and holds them accountable for their actions.

Confidence Building

Confidence is the subjective belief that one has competence. It is linked with optimistic attitudes and a belief in the value of perseverance. Youth who have not succeeded in classically recognized areas (schools, the world of work) may not believe they have the capability to do so. Without confidence, they will not engage in the program. Rather than experience another failure, they may choose to leave. When they do leave it will be unlikely they will state it is for fear of failure. Rather, they will resort to a protective posture and likely shift blame elsewhere. Increasing retention in youth programs, therefore, depends critically on the development of confidence in students. Specifically, students must be given a belief in their ability to achieve competencies. A staged approach to helping students recognize their competencies was previously described as building on islands of competence.

An individual's ability to buffer stress can be most consistently measured by that individual's locus of control (Kliewer and Sandler 1992). One must distinguish, however, between internal and external loci of control. While an internal locus of control, indicates confidence, an external locus of control reflects low self-esteem and insecurity. In fact, individuals with low self-esteem consistently view successes as a result of luck but take personal

responsibility for failures. Programs focused on building confidence must help youth recognize their successes. In addition, students must realize that mistakes are a critical component of the learning process and that difficult situations should be embraced (Brooks 1994).

Program counselors can emphasize the important role the student plays in his or her own development, helping youth recognize that they can control their lives. Students should be encouraged to participate in their own learning experiences and to view their input as respected and valued (Mills et al.1988). In addition to building competence, opportunities to participate in community programs give youth a sense of self-efficacy and confidence (Braverman et al.1994).

Although individuals with low self-esteem often possess a lack of faith in their inherent abilities, outside sources can reinforce or create self-destructive beliefs. The at-risk label, which is itself a risk factor, (Wolin 1995) is commonplace in youth programs. Aside from causing victim blaming (Franklin 1995) by labeling youth "at-risk," we communicate the idea that little hope exists for them. Teachers must communicate to students that they have the highest expectations for them. As Davis and Boster (1992) write, "We live up to what we perceive as other people's expectations of our behavior." (Davis and Boster 1992, pg. 572) One study demonstrated that the educational and occupational goals of urban African-American males were influenced heavily by the level of encouragement they received from parents, teachers, and peers (Walker and Sutherland 1993). Mundy expresses this fact by saying, "Positive messages that communicate expectations of success, not failure, are critical in breaking the negative self-perpetuating cycle of failure" (Mundy 1996, pg. 83).

The development of cultural or ethnic pride is of particular importance when building confidence in minority youth (Howard 1996). Evans comments that African-American culture has a similar framework to Wolin and Wolin's seven resiliencies in the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. These principles are Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamma (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). He suggests that an appropriate means to foster resiliency in African-Americans is to also foster cultural pride and confidence by utilizing these principles (Evans 1998; Webpage, National Association for Children of Alcoholics).

Staff members need to find and acknowledge each individual's positive traits and skills. For example, a student with low literacy may have outstanding verbal skills. A formerly gang-affiliated student may have leadership skills. A school dropout may have worked and supported

their family through a financial crisis. These positive traits must be those that are built upon to encourage future success.

Centers should consider that a well-organized recreational program may allow students to experience confidence through athletics, music or art. In fact, certain physical challenges may be more readily met than educational or vocational challenges. Programs, such as Outward Bound, build self-confidence and foster self-direction and trust by having participants meet a personal challenge, face failure, and learn to overcome it through reasonable responsible action. Job Corps Centers' recreational and/or orientation programs might consider using some of the techniques to build self-confidence early on when students are most insecure.

Connectedness

Youth in residential intervention programs have removed themselves from all of their relationships. Though in some cases this distance may offer the fresh start needed to change life direction, it is nonetheless challenging. Most youth from even desperate circumstances are still deeply connected to their family. Youth from the most dire circumstances may feel the most anxiety, or guilt, for having left their families. Some dangerous relationships such as gang affiliations or drug-using peer groups, may have served as a support system. Suddenly, alone and disconnected, the person is at acute risk for homesickness and the desire to return to a world they know how to navigate.

A critical component in the development of resiliency is the presence of a close bond with at least one other person, adult or peer, who can provide stability and much needed attention to youth (Mundy 1996; Embry 1997; Wright 1996; Davis et al.1994). However, youth from adverse environments have particular difficulty developing intimacy with others. As Greene says, "Intimacy does not thrive in environments where violence abounds and where economic survival is a constant pressure... Youth often become... 'crusted over.' They do not let people inside..." (Greene 1993, pg. 110). Staff, must overcome the tendency of their students to avoid relationships and develop connectedness, so that peer and adult bonds can be formed.

When an individual arrives isolated, unsure of how to navigate the program, effective guidance may be critical in preventing a student from feeling lost. Mentors can be adults or successful students in the program. The significance of a supportive peer group and mentorship

from an adult in the lives of individuals from troubled environments has been emphasized repeatedly (Franklin 1995; Gregory 1995; Brooks 1994; Greene 1993; Mundy 1996).

Connecting with other members of the program will increase a feeling of belonging for the new enrollee. Students who have successfully negotiated Job Corps for a length of time are ideally situated to actively integrate newcomers. Something has worked for those participants who have been there for a few months, perhaps whatever is working for them can be imparted to the new attendees. Further, selection as a mentor also has substantial benefit to the person selected, it promotes responsibility, serves as a recognition of their character, and increases their sense of confidence.

Peer Relationships

A study of the Positive Youth Development Program, a program designed to promote confidence in young adults, found that newcomers to the program received lower popularity ratings than their peers (Caplan et al. 1992). Because of the importance of peer standing, particularly among younger participants, it should come as no surprise that youth have a tendency to drop out of programs when they feel their standing is threatened. Franklin (1995) found that students would sacrifice their academic achievements before they would lose their peers' regard. To address program attrition, it becomes critical for students to have opportunities to immediately develop peer relationships with others who view full program participation positively. The operative word, *positive,* must be stressed because peer groups can strongly influence youth, either positively or negatively (Gregory 1995).

Mundy underscores the importance of promoting only positive peer relationships by reporting that "attachment and social integration with successfully socialized individuals and groups provide a buffer against delinquency and drug use" (Mundy 1996, pg. 81). Conversely, "isolating high risk youth with individuals predisposed to delinquent values and attitudes can lead to increases, rather than decreases, in delinquent involvement" (Mundy 1996, pg. 84). In the case of attrition within Job Corps, staff should be aware that new enrollees are looking for peer relationships immediately upon arrival. Staff should be aware of which students harbor negative attitudes about the program, and subtly buffer new orientees from their influence.

The literature discusses several suggestions for encouraging these relationships. First, peer group discussions should be encouraged. This allows youth to find friends, as well as to

learn how to listen to others and how to ask questions and communicate effectively (Greene 1993). It has been demonstrated that youth prefer group meetings over individual substance abuse programs to help them recognize that others have similar difficulties. Additionally, the group format allows for a bonding experience among peers, while simultaneously demonstrating the importance of sharing one's feelings with others (Davis et al. 1994).

Cross-group friendships should be encouraged among students. Aside from fostering self-esteem and self-efficacy (Clark 1991), these friendships have been shown to positively affect achievement and occupational status (Braddock et al. 1991), especially for minority students (Winfield 1994). Finally, it has been suggested that cliques be broken down. Aside from promoting relationships among peers, this will also prepare youth for the non-exclusive environment of the work world.

Adult Relationships

The most consistent theme in the youth development and resiliency literatures is that guidance and support from a caring adult is pivotal in determining whether a young person can overcome challenges. Brooks (1994) writes that in order to foster resiliency, every youth needs one supportive relationship with an adult who will help him or her unconditionally. Students themselves have spoken of the role of smaller classes and/or schools in providing them with the personal attention from teachers and staff that makes the difference for them (Gregory 1995).

Perhaps the most poignant expressions of the importance of positive, caring teachers come from interviews with students. Franklin interviewed students in high-risk situations and was given very moving replies:

> These teachers don't care about what's going on in my life. All they want from me is my homework and stuff like that. They don't care about what's up at home. They just think that if you don't do your homework or if you fall asleep in class that you lazy and stupid. So forget it…cause I bet you any money that none of them can survive in my neighborhood. I'll give them a week to live my life and we'll see who can't seem to pay attention in class. Cause last week, my friend's brother got shot and I didn't feel like being at school and not one of my teachers asked me what was wrong. If they cared, they would be more interested and involved with me and what's going on in my life. But it's like this…as long as they getting paid, they're set (Darnell) (Franklin 1995, pg. 86).

Katrina attributes her successes to the support she gets from her teachers:

> Some teachers here, they're nice and they help us out and they really try to teach us because they want us to get out of school and make something of ourselves. That kind of support keeps me on the honor role and helps me keep my grades up. It makes me feel

> good to know that these teachers really care about me. Especially when they…like say…in math class when I don't understand something they take out time to come over and help so I'll understand it and just don't sit there. When I need to talk about other stuff they're down with that, too (Franklin 1995, pg. 87).

In an interview of students in a residential school setting, it was found that the greatest obstacle to adjustment for youth was being away from home, and the primary means by which students acclimated was by developing relationships with others (Shaw 1995). A 1995 survey found that 65% of youth would like to spend more time with an adult who respects them and who they can trust (Search Institute, Saito, and Roehlkepartain 1995). One of the key elements in a successful program is a supportive relationship with an adult who genuinely likes his or her students (even if he or she does not always like what they do) (Greene 1993). Additionally, Greene emphasizes that youth need an adult role model, generally one who either grew up in similar circumstances or who shares a similar cultural background. Youth *want* to become someone's concern (Newberg and Sims 1996).

Summary

This chapter's overriding premise is that dropout is not a random event. Rather, it occurs when a young person is unable to overcome barriers to his/her full engagement into the program. Retention must be fostered actively by staff. First, staff must support youth to overcome barriers to their full commitment to the program. Second, staff must challenge students in a manner that confirms for young people that they will benefit from their investment. Job Corps' challenge is to create a program attractive enough to participants to recruit them, useful enough to benefit them, and supportive enough to retain them.

This chapter focused on how incorporating the youth resiliency and youth development models into center culture would increase retention. Job Corps has stood apart for decades as a program which recognized that only a comprehensive, multilayered, long-term, supportive intervention would lead to its students being genuinely employable. Thus, Job Corps may be uniquely suited to take the next steps necessary to move beyond the traditional "fix-it" paradigm to build stronger, more resilient youth. Youth deliver what is expected of them. Therefore, young people whose risks are highlighted will perform as "at-risk youth." Alternatively, young people whose strengths are recognized, fostered, and developed will better survive, more efficiently change, and more creatively overcome limitations to perform better in the work environment. Youth who are enrolled in a program staffed by individuals committed to student success will overcome their ambivalence and fears and choose to invest themselves in the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overriding recommendation of this research team responds to the pivotal role staff members play in determining the success of students:

- **Job Corps should initiate a staff-development effort to assure all staff members are equipped with the training necessary to maximize their impact on students.**
  The pivotal ingredient that determines whether a student will stay and obtain maximal benefit from the Job Corps experience is the quality of staff-student interactions. We believe that staff well-versed in the youth development and youth resiliency approaches will be best prepared to serve as change-agents for young people.

  The initiative should have clearly defined objectives. They should include staff members' acquiring skill-sets that will assure they are well prepared to:

  - recognize and take active steps to lower institutional and personal barriers to students' ongoing participation in the program;
  - demonstrate that they expect the best from youth, and hold them accountable to achieving their best;
  - build students' confidence in their ability to achieve;
  - build students' sense of connectedness to their peers, to staff, and to the integrity of the program;
  - generate challenges for young people that enable them to explore their capabilities;
  - communicate effectively with youth from different cultural backgrounds;
  - foster a thriving multicultural environment;
  - model and teach stress reduction and positive coping strategies; and
  - communicate effectively with youth at different developmental stages.

  The recommendation for a staff development initiative is made with the understanding that it is not a casual undertaking, rather it will require significant effort and resources. However, we believe that if the initiative is well implemented, the potential rewards to student and staff will significantly outweigh the expenditure of resources. If staff-student relationships are made more effective, not only will retention increase, but every aspect of

the program that involves staff guiding, educating, or training students will benefit. Further, adults who work with youth having a history of past failures are inspired by young people's successes, but they also often experience frustration for those who do not make it. A staff development effort that improves staff members' capacity to tip the scales toward success will lessen staff frustration, increase their job-satisfaction, and possibly even affect staff turnover.

This staff development effort holds a real potential of failure if it is not implemented carefully and evaluated rigorously. First, it cannot be externally imposed; rather staff and administrators must continue to have input into the content and structure of such an initiative. They will know best how to design a staff-development model that comfortably changes, rather than clashes, with center culture. Second, a one-time training will not realistically achieve the stated objectives. A one-time training may motivate staff, but it will be unlikely to generate the comfort level needed to utilize new approaches. Rather, the training must be intensive, it must allow time to practice and develop skills, and it must be consistently reinforced. Third, because key center administrators will have significant influence over whether new approaches are accepted on center, it is critical that they are fully appraised of the challenges and benefits of any proposed staff training. These administrators should be part of the development process and should receive advance training so that they can facilitate general staff training and reinforce the use of newly acquired skill-sets. Finally, this staff development effort must include every staff member because each employee on a Job Corps center is a potential counselor and role model to the young people he/she serves.

Additional recommendations:

- **Job Corps should strive toward balancing genders at each site.**
  The data revealed that women are more likely to remain in the program when the center has at least 40% female students. Furthermore, men have an increased rate of leaving the program when the centers have a large male predominance.

- **Recognizing that students with dependents are less likely to stay, Job Corps should study how to best retain them.**

  Though this analysis has not produced data enabling us to definitively recommend how to best support students with dependents, certain solutions seem worth considering. An expansion of non-residential centers or non-residential slots may allow parents greater latitude to attend Job Corps. Increased childcare capacity on sites may both attract more women and allow adults with dependents to attend the program more easily.

- **Recognizing that students with lower educational test scores are more attrition prone, Job Corps should study what extra supports these students may need**.

  The literature review and both quantitative and qualitative analyses emphasize the importance of an individual's level of educational attainment in predicting his/her likelihood of succeeding in a program. It is not surprising that students with greater past achievements are likely to continue having further successes. However, the challenge is in determining what extra levels of support may make a difference in a young person being able to change a pattern of low achievement. This support might be some combination of academic enrichment with measures that build confidence. Further study in this area is warranted.

- **Job Corps should explore how best to serve its youngest participants.**

  Forty percent of Job Corps students are 16 or 17 years of age. Qualitative and quantitative analyses confirm that younger age is associated with program attrition. One choice for Job Corps would be to raise the enrollment age. This, however, would be a strong reaction to a factor, that when controlled for other variables, only makes students 5-7% more likely to leave the program. Further, we believe that high school dropouts at 16 or 17 years of age are at a pivotal decision point where they can choose generally positive or negative life directions. Thus, mid-adolescents can substantially benefit from the opportunity Job Corps offers in ways not traditionally measured by performance standards (e.g., avoiding criminality). The 16 and 17 year olds are, however, at a unique developmental stage and may be inherently challenging to authority figures. This may explain why, in the qualitative process, the perception regarding the importance of age on retention seems to be greater than the reality substantiated in the logistic regression models. Further study is warranted, but a

body of literature and experience exists on how to work with mid-adolescents to best promote positive behaviors while limiting their conflicts with authority figures.

- **Prospective students should receive a pre-enrollment center preview.**
  The logistic regression demonstrated that, even when controlled for all other variables, students who were screened for admission on a Job Corps Center were 25% more likely to be retained at 30 days. We believe this finding indicates that students who had a better idea of what to expect at a center were more likely to stay. It is not feasible or wise to move all outreach and admission centers to sites as it would discriminate against youth that live far from the center. However, it may be cost effective to have as many young people as possible receive a pre-enrollment tour. At the least, a detailed video program describing life on each center should be available for those students who are unable to receive a tour.

The ultimate form of RESPECT is to show students that we care so deeply about their success that we will do "whatever it takes" to make them realize tha within themselves lie the seeds of success.

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